

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Director says Murray was his muse. So Bill's got that going for him

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Bill Murray



Unit brings holiday spirit to isolated troops in Iraq

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AP tells BCS to stop using its poll in rankings

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2004

Military fears rebels had inside help for Mosul blast

Some reports indicate attack was suicide bombing Pages 3-4



Wounded begin arriving at Landstuhl

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A soldier wounded in the attack on the American base in Mosul is loaded onto a bus at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. At nearby Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, trauma surgeons and volunteers prepared as more than 40 wounded in the explosion at the dining facility were flown in Wednesday night on a U.S. Air Force C-141 Starlifter.

MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

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News Tracker ... What's new with old news

States

School experiment relaunched: Nearly two years after their experiments were destroyed in the Columbia shuttle explosion, U.S. high school students are getting a second chance to see how space affects everyday things such as hair, flowering seeds and plant food. This time, the work of the students at 11 high schools across the United States will be on board an unmanned Russian supply rocket headed for the International Space Station. Its launch is scheduled for Thursday.

Immigrant smuggling trial: The feeling that the longer a jury deliberates, the better it is for defendants might not apply in the first trial connected to the nation's deadliest human smuggling attempt, according to an attorney who specializes in federal criminal defense.

Jurors resumed deliberations Wednesday on the fate of two men prosecutors say were part of a smuggling ring responsible for the deaths of 19 illegal immigrants.

The jury has deliberated for about 6½ hours on both Monday and Tuesday. It got the case late Thursday, then took Friday and the weekend off.

Victor Jesus Rodriguez and Freddy Giovanni Garcia-Tobar are accused of helping arrange for the transport of more than 70 illegal immigrants in a hot, airless tractor-trailer from South Texas to Houston in May 2003.

Chicago high rise fire: Investigators have determined that the downtown high-rise fire that raged for 5½ hours earlier this week was caused by an electrical malfunction.

At least 37 people, including nearly two dozen firefighters, were injured in the Dec. 6 fire on the upper floors of the LaSalle Bank headquarters. The stubborn blaze required more than 300 firefighters to bring it under control.

The fire started in the space above a ceiling on the building's 29th floor, but officials do not know the exact point where it began or what sparked it, said Lt. Anthony Martin of the Chicago Fire Department.

Bus evacuation meetings: Local and state officials involved in a test evacuation of schools last week went to meet privately to figure out what went wrong, leaving nearly 1,000 students without bus transportation.

A clear picture of the glitches that undercut the Dec. 16 evacuation — and what changes can be made to the area's evacuation plan — will be the focus of Wednesday's meeting, several emergency officials said Monday.

The private meeting will include representatives from the local school district, the town of Brattleboro, Vermont Emergency Management and the Laidlaw bus company of New Hampshire.

World

Iceland rejects U.S. request: Iceland has rejected a U.S. request to drop the offer of a residency permit for former American chess champion Bobby Fischer, officials said Tuesday.

U.S. Ambassador James Gadsden had asked the country last week to withdraw its offer because Fischer is wanted in the United States on criminal charges on charges of violating international sanctions against Yugoslavia for playing chess there in 1992.

But on Monday, Foreign Secretary David Oddison invited Gadsden to a meeting and told U.S. ambassadors that the Icelandic government stood by its offer, Icelandic officials said.

Gadsden was told that Iceland wanted to recognize its historic connection with Fischer, who has been a hero in great esteem here since winning the chess World Championship in Reykjavik in 1972.



Violence continues in Thailand: A Thai soldier guards Buddhist monks on their morning rounds Nov. 9 in Pattani, Thailand. Muslims in the south have long complained of discrimination within the predominantly Buddhist country and have risen up several times in modern history in attempts to forge a separate state. Meanwhile, thousands of teachers planned to walk off their jobs starting Thursday, saying the government has failed to protect them from Muslim rebels blamed for killing three of their colleagues in recent weeks.

Oddison also told Gadsden that Fischer's alleged U.S. crime had exceeded Iceland's statute of limitations, and for that reason Iceland would not be bound by a U.S. extradition request if the chess player moved to Iceland from Japan.

Austrian cable car fire cause: A U.S. appeals court has ruled that class action status and a single liability trial are not appropriate for families of victims of a cable car fire in Austria four years ago that killed 155 people.

The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan said a lower court judge had made a mistake in analyzing how U.S. laws would permit such a case to proceed. Martin J. D'Uso, a lawyer for eight plaintiffs named in the lawsuit, said the appeals court ruling cuts off an avenue that more than 100 potential plaintiffs overseas were counting on. He said he did not know whether the ruling would be appealed.

The ruling could force families to press lawsuits separately in European courts, rather than as a group in U.S. courts — a much more costly proposition, D'Uso said.

The plaintiffs alleged that the companies were responsible for train and tunnel defects that caused the deaths in Kaprun, Austria.

Eight Americans died in the Nov. 11, 2000, accident, including a family of four and a newly engaged couple, when fire engulfed a cable car going through a mountain tunnel.

U.S. protests in Cuba: Thousands of Cuban university students rallied outside the U.S. Interests Section in the capital to protest the mission's Christmas display supporting local dissidents.

The students listened to speeches and waved signs with socialist slogans and images of revolutionary icon Ernesto "Che" Guevara at Anti-imperialist Plaza near the mission.

Government media on Tuesday estimated the crowd at 5,000.

International media based in Cuba were not invited to Monday's night's event.

Spain bombings arrest: A Spanish judge charged a Moroccan suspect with terrorism and mass killings for allegedly helping plan the March 11 Madrid train bombings, court officials said.

Hasan al Haski, 41, was charged with 191 counts of murder, 1,000 counts of attempted murder and belonging to a terrorist organization, said a court official on condition of anonymity.

Al Haski, arrested in the Canary Islands last week, was being pending trial later Tuesday, following further questioning by Spain's main anti-terrorism judge, Baltasar Garzon.

The charges came after hours of questioning at the National Court by Judge Juan del Olmo, who is leading the investigation into the attacks that killed 191 people.

Sudan peace agreement: Suffering continues in war-ravaged western Sudan. But to the south, after 21 years of conflict, things are looking up.

The Islamic government in Khartoum may be ready to initial a peace agreement with southern Sudanese rebels on or before a Dec. 31 deadline. There might even be a formal signing ceremony in Washington if all goes well during the next month.

That can come, however, only after the government and the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Movement work out some pending questions.

U.S. officials consider the two conflicts linked, exacerbated by government policies, and they say unless the situation in western Sudan's Darfur region changes for the better, the proposal for a Washington ceremony will be off the table.

Jihad tapes found: Authorities found two audio cassettes urging jihad in the house of a man being retried on charges he aided the Hamburg al-Qaida cell that included three of the Sept. 11 suicide hijackers, a federal agent testified Wednesday.

The cassettes were found by police in the bedroom of Mounir el Motassadeq two months after the Sept. 11 attacks, agent Joerg Effelsberg testified.

El Motassadeq, 30, is being retried on more than 3,000 counts of accessory to murder and membership in a terrorist organization on suspicion he provided logistical support for suicide hijackers Mohamed Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah.

The tapes glorified fighting holy war, or jihad, Effelsberg told the court.

The trial broke for the holidays after Wednesday's testimony, and is scheduled to resume Jan. 4.

Stories and photo from The Associated Press

U.S. investigates attack on Mosul base

Evidence indicates that insurgents responsible had inside knowledge of base's layout, schedule

BY SLOBODAN LEKIC

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Hundreds of U.S. troops, backed up by armored vehicles and helicopters, on Wednesday blocked bridges and cordoned off areas of Mosul where insurgents have mounted attacks.

The operation in the nearly deserted city came a day after one of the deadliest incidents for U.S. troops, when 22 people died in a blast at a nearby military camp.

U.S. officials in Mosul said they investigated into the cause of the blast was continuing.

Initial reports said that a rocket had ripped into the tent.

Later, however, a radical Sunni Muslim group, the Ansar al-Sunnah Army, claimed responsibility, saying it was a "martyrdom operation" — a reference to a suicide bomber.

"We are not ready to release any official results of the investigation. Until that time comes we cannot say if it is a rocket or a suicide attack," said Capt. Joseph Ludvigson of Task Force Olympia.

Regardless of the cause, the apparent sophistication of the operation indicated that the insurgents

probably had inside knowledge of the base's layout and soldiers' schedule.

There was little apparent sympathy for the dead Americans in Mosul's empty streets. "I wish that 2,000 U.S. soldiers were killed," declared Jamal Mahmud, a trade union official.

On Monday, a blast destroyed a packed mess tent on Forward Operating Base Marez — a military camp for U.S. and Iraqi government forces just south of Mosul — killing 22 people and injuring 69. The lunchtime attack represented one of the worst single incidents for the U.S. military in Iraq.

The attack sparked renewed concerns about the ability of U.S. troops and their Iraqi allies to provide security for key legislative elections on Jan. 30.

The U.S. military said they had expected an increase in violence as insurgents attempt to disrupt the political process and derail elections for an assembly that will draft Iraq's new constitution.

"Insurgents, who have everything to lose, are desperate to create the perception that elections are not possible," said Gen. George W. Casey, the commander of multinational forces in Iraq.

"We will not allow terrorist violence to stop progress toward elections."

Mortar attacks on U.S. bases, particularly on the huge white tents that serve as dining halls, have been frequent in Iraq for more than a year. Just last month, a mortar attack on a Mosul base killed two troops with Task Force Olympia, the reinforced brigade responsible for security in much of northern Iraq.

The dead included 13 U.S. service members, five U.S. civilians, three Iraqi National Guard members, and one "unidentified non-US person," the U.S. military command in Baghdad said in its latest statement on Wednesday evening.

Of the 69 wounded, 44 are members of the U.S. military, seven are U.S. contractors, five are U.S. Defense Department civilians, two are Iraqi civilians, 10 are contractors of other nationalities, and one is of unknown nationality and occupation, the statement said.

About 50 people — most of them injured soldiers from Mosul — arrived on an Air Force C-141 transport plane at Ramstein Air Base in Germany for treatment at nearby Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, said Maj. Mike Young, a base spokesman.

The hospital said at least eight were in critical condition. Landstuhl spokeswoman Marie Shaw



MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

An unidentified casualty is lifted into an ambulance at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Wednesday. Some 50 patients, most of whom were injured during Tuesday's attack in Mosul, Iraq, arrived at the U.S. base on Wednesday after a flight from Balad, Iraq.

said. With a light snow falling, some wounded were carried out on stretchers, while about a dozen were expected to be well enough to walk off the plane.

In the immediate aftermath of the occupation of Iraq in April 2003, Mosul — with a population of 1.2 million — was cited as a model success story by U.S. commanders. But armed opposition has mounted steadily, especially since last month's U.S.-led operation to retake the rebel-held town of Fallujah.

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Tuesday, at least 1,319 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count.

At least 1,021 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said. The figures include three military civilians.

The AP count is 19 higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. EST Tuesday.

The British military has reported 75 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 16; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,181 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 912 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

Since the start of U.S. military operations in Iraq, 9,981 U.S. servicemen have been wounded in hostile action, according to the Defense Department's weekly tally.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ An attack on a mess hall near Mosul on Tuesday killed 15 U.S. servicemen.

■ The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ No new identifications reported.

Military was in process of building a safer bunker

BY MATT KELLEY

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Worried about recent artillery attacks on American mess halls in Iraq, the U.S. military had nearly completed a reinforced dining area near the mess tent where an insurgent attack killed 22 people.

Iraqi insurgents have attacked several U.S. military dining hall tents with mortars or rockets over the past few months. On Tuesday, before the hardened dining hall at Forward Operating Base Marez could be completed, an explosion ripped through a tent where hundreds of troops were sitting down to lunch.

Defense Department officials initially said a 122 mm rocket caused the blast, but on Wednesday military officials in Iraq said they were investigating the possibility of an explosive planted in the tent or brought in by a suicide bomber.

The military was building a bunker-like mess hall at the Marez base as part of continuing efforts to make the base safer. Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz, commander of the multinational force in Iraq, said the new facility was due to be completed in February.

"We recognized the threat," Metz said Wednesday in television interviews. "We've been looking at the force-protection parameters, not only for dining facilities, but for other places we have large gatherings."

But from rockets or mortars — what the military calls "indirect fire" — have been commonplace at U.S. bases in the Mosul area, as well as other insurgency hot spots in Iraq. Dining halls are a prime target because they offer a readily identifiable place where lots of troops congregate at predictable times.

For example, a mortar round hit near the mess hall in a Tikrit dining hall during one night in March. The round didn't ex-



An injured civilian employee that worked in the dining facility at a base near Mosul, Iraq, is loaded into the back of a Stryker vehicle after an attack on the dining facility Tuesday.

pode and no one was injured. Insurgents also launched rockets that month which exploded near a large military dining hall within Baghdad's Green Zone where U.S. and Iraqi government offices are located. Another mortar round injured three soldiers at a dining hall on another Baghdad base in February.

"It is extremely difficult to prevent these appalling and horrific attacks," said Wendy Hall, spokeswoman for Halliburton Co., the Army contractor that provides food services in Iraq.

Halliburton said it lost several employees and subcontractors in the attack.

At many bases — including Marez — troops have been required to wear their body armor

and helmets while in the dining hall because of the threat of attack. Most of the attacks don't hit any structures or cause any injuries, however.

Still, one soldier was killed near the dining hall at Marez in a mortar attack in May, and two soldiers were killed in November when mortars exploded in their living area on the same base.

Maj. John Nelson, the battalion's chief surgeon, told a reporter earlier this year about plans for a possible attack on the dining hall. Nelson told the Portland (Maine) Press Herald that military statistics showed that if a 60 mm mortar shell hit the dining hall with 400 soldiers inside, an estimated 12 would die no matter what medical care could do.

Mosul wounded begin arriving at Landstuhl

BY BEN MURRAY
Stars and Stripes

LANDSTUHL, Germany — The aftermath of Tuesday's deadly explosion at a U.S. military dining facility in Iraq began to reach Europe's military medical hub Wednesday, where 41 wounded troops and civilians arrived for treatment.

At Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, trauma surgeons and volunteers prepared for the influx of wounded from the explosion that rocked a chow hall in Mosul. In all, 15 U.S. soldiers were killed and 72 American soldiers, civilians and Iraqi security personnel were wounded in the attack, according to media reports.

Some critically injured patients arrived at Landstuhl late Tuesday. Another military plane arrived at nearby Ramstein Air Base at about 4 p.m. Wednesday. Eight of the patients were hurt badly enough to be on ventilators, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Chaplains prepared to minister to the incoming wounded and medical teams around the area were put on two-hour call.

Landstuhl spokeswoman Marie Shaw said the influx of wounded was a heavy load but not as intense as the steady stream of injured during the recent battle

in Fallujah, Iraq.

"That's a lot at one time ... [but] we're not overwhelmed yet," Shaw said Wednesday.

Many of the patients on Wednesday's flight had broken bones, shrapnel wounds and abdominal injuries from a blast that was initially reported as a rocket strike. However, the cause of the explosion is being investigated, according to media reports.

As of Wednesday, 18,434 patients from the Iraq theater had been treated at the hospital for all types of injuries since the start of the war, Shaw said.

While medical teams waited for the arrival of the patients, support services around Landstuhl also were mobilizing.

A spokeswoman for the Fisher House, which provides free lodging to families of seriously wounded patients at the hospital, said staff members were already making reservations and preparing rooms for new guests.

In the Landstuhl chaplain's office, Chaplain (Maj.) David Bowerman said he and his fellow chaplains would be "praying for strength, praying for guidance," as they prepared to minister to the wounded, their families, hospital staff — and each other.

"When you're a mother and you've got a son downrange ... you feel like you're a mother to all of them."

Michele McCaslin
Landstuhl volunteer



BEN MURRAY/Stars and Stripes

Volunteers on Wednesday pore through letters sent to troops at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. The group helped chaplains at the hospital make up hundreds of holiday gift packets for patients and wounded soldiers. The volunteers, are, from left, Ariana Jeske, Carolyn Nichols, Amy Nichols, Brad Hedden and Stephanie Nichols (partially hidden in background).

Outside Bowerman's office, rows of boxes lined the hallway, filled with gifts and cards sent from people wishing wounded troops a happy holiday.

About 10 volunteers were working Wednesday to sort the gifts and assemble them in packages to be handed out to patients over the coming days. They also folded donated clothes for troops whose uniforms had been cut off during medical treatment in the field.

One of those volunteers, Michele McCaslin from Los Angeles, has been giving her time at Landstuhl since the beginning of the month, living at a nearby hotel so

she can walk to the hospital to help.

McCaslin said she wanted to volunteer while her son, Spc. Mark Bishop, is deployed to Iraq — at a base just south of Mosul, she said.

"I was pretty dumbstruck," she said when she heard about the attack Tuesday. Though she later found out her son was unhurt, the news still weighed on her, she said.

"When you're a mother and you've got a son downrange ... you feel like you're a mother to all of them," she said.

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Quick thinking amid chaos during dining hall attack

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jeremy Redmon, a Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch reporter embedded with U.S. troops, was at Forward Operating Base Marez when it came under attack. Here is his account of his visit to a hospital where the wounded were taken.

BY JEREMY REDMON

Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch

MOSUL, Iraq — Sgt. Kyle Wright was about to take a bite of chocolate cake when the blast knocked him out of his chair.

Two other Virginia National Guardsmen picked him up and rushed him out of the chow-hall tent on Forward Operating Base Marez.

"I kind of went into the air," Wright said as he lay in a hospital near Mosul air-

field, recovering from wounds to his leg and back.

"When I came to, I looked up and I saw open sky."

The Richlands, Va., resident smiled, remembering it was his wedding anniversary. A brown blanket covered his waist. An IV tube dangled from his arm.

Wright is a member of the Richmond-based 276th Engineer Battalion, which is supporting U.S. troops that have been fighting a growing insurgency in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul for the past year.

U.S. troops and firefighters, civilian contractors from KBR, and Iraqi National Guardsmen pulled together and carried about 80 wounded and dead soldiers to the hospital.

"The response today was phenome-

nal," said Master Sgt. David Scott, chief ward master for the hospital. "It was like a parking lot out there."

The hospital workers scrambled to treat soldiers injured from many BB-size pellets that sprayed from the explosion. They also treated soldiers for burns, shrapnel wounds and damage to their eyes.

"This is the worst we have seen in the 11 months since we have been here," Scott said. "Today was really the test for us."

Lt. Col. Ed Morgan, the commander of the 276th, was in Kuwait on Tuesday returning from two weeks of leave when one of his officers called him with the news. The blast killed two soldiers and injured four others with their unit.

Morgan immediately caught a flight to Mosul and rushed to the hospital, where

he visited Wright. Morgan said the attack showed cowardice.

"There is no face on this enemy that killed my troops," he said. "Who was there to fight? It is not honorable."

Just hours after the explosion, Morgan was trying to focus his men on their missions. His unit has been hunting booby traps, guarding bridges in Mosul and rebuilding the city's roads. In the past year, Morgan's men have received 27 Purple Hearts.

"Our prayers and our thoughts are with the families, and they will stay with the families," he said firmly.

Asked about Wright, Morgan noted the sergeant is deeply religious and sings "Amazing Grace" beautifully. Wright told Morgan he was concerned about the other troops with the 276th and would pray for them. Morgan said he would do the same.

U.S. construction company drops out of Iraq contract

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An international construction company has pulled out of its contract to rebuild Iraq's transportation system, deciding it was too dangerous to stay, a spokesman for the U.S.-led reconstruction effort said Wednesday.

Contract International Inc. withdrew from their contract last month after a surge in attacks on reconstruction efforts, said Lt. Col. Eric Schnaible of the Pentagon's Project and Contract Office in Baghdad.

"It's hard to do construction in a place where people are shooting

at you or intimidating your work force," Schnaible said in a telephone interview. "It's a challenge across the country."

The PCO has taken over management of about 18 subcontractors working on transportation projects, Schnaible said. He said Contract's pullout was "a mutual-

ly agreed-to separation" and does not signal a larger movement by U.S.-based companies to abandon Iraq.

"Some parts of the country are a whole lot more permissive than others," Schnaible said. "Where we can get the work done, good things are happening."

Contract President Karim Camel-Toueg did not immediately return telephone messages left at the company's Arlington, Va., offices Wednesday.

Security concerns have been a major reason for the slow pace of reconstruction which has frustrated Iraqi and U.S. officials alike.

Families of Mosul victims try to get info

BY CHRIS L. JENKINS

The Washington Post

RICHMOND, Va. — The call came to Patricia Otto's home at dawn, waking her from a restless sleep. Her husband, Lt. Shawn Otto, a 40-year-old soldier stationed with the Virginia National Guard in Iraq, was on the other end of the line.

"He said, 'I just want you to know that I'm OK,'" she recalled from her Williamsburg home.

"You're going to hear about some horrible stuff that's happened today. I can't say anything more ... but I'm OK."

Thus began a day of fear, relief and sorrow for Trish Otto, 38, and dozens of others with loved ones in the Richmond-based 276th Engineer Battalion, the Virginia Na-

tional Guard unit that was among those attacked Tuesday by Iraqi insurgents outside the northern city of Mosul.

There was relief for families that heard directly from relatives telling them they had survived. There was fear, because others hadn't had any direct reports. There was sorrow because family members felt the pain of others who might have their worst fears confirmed.

Despite extensive news reporting on the attack, the families had little direct information.

"That's the hardest part about this for so many," said Melissa Doss, 32, of Henrico County. She did know that her husband, Capt. Chris Doss, also 32, was not wounded.

As the organizer for families of the guardsmen, she had received a flurry of e-mails and calls from worried people looking for answers.

"It's been a hard, hard day," Doss said. "Many of the families are in turmoil, trying to understand what's happened and if their loved ones are OK."

Just two weeks ago, the support group held a family day for the soldiers' children and spouses.

Virginia's leaders expressed support for the families of the guardsmen, who have been in Iraq since March and are scheduled to come home by the first week of March 2005.

"This further reinforces the enormous sacrifice ... of these citizen soldiers," Democratic Gov. Mark Warner said in front

of the governor's mansion. Warner said he had spent time with the battalion exactly a year ago Tuesday, as they were being deployed to Fort Dix, N.J., before shipping out for Iraq.

"These are our bravest men and women who are putting their lives on the line to protect the freedoms that we all enjoy," Republican state Attorney General Jerry Kilgore said.

The 276th Engineer Battalion, which Virginia Guard officials said can trace its history to Colonial times, has a mission that is shared by companies throughout the war-torn country: finding and removing land mines, securing bridges, building fortifications. Its soldiers also are responsible for securing the border with Syria, where many insurgents are thought to be slipping through.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair, center, inspects Iraqi troops with Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, left, in Baghdad on Tuesday. A new study says Iraqis won't be able to undertake missions on their own until 2006.

Study: Iraqi forces unable to operate on own until 2006

BY WALTER PINCUS

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Pentagon figures show that the training of Iraqi military and police units has improved since the summer but that those forces will not be prepared to undertake security missions on their own until late 2006 at the earliest, according to a study released Tuesday by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"Changes in the way the U.S. is preparing Iraqi forces may ... create the kind of Iraqi forces that are vital to both Iraq's future and any successful reductions in U.S. forces and U.S. withdrawals from Iraq," Anthony Cordesman says in the latest in a series of papers he has produced as a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"It is not clear that these (new training) steps can overcome the legacy of past neglect and failure, but they do offer serious hope," adds Cordesman, a former Pentagon official who has made several trips to Iraq.

Cordesman describes as "tragically" a series of U.S. failures in Iraq that created the current problems, including "a failure to react to the growing insurgency in Iraq and for the need for Iraqi military, security and police forces that could be true partners in fighting that threat."

He blames not only the Bush administration's civilian leadership, but also the U.S. military. "In general," Cordesman says, "the military, as well as the civilians, did not plan for successful conflict termination or stability operations, and it focused on early withdrawal rather than the range of missions that might occur." He recalls that some pre-invasion plans called for a rapid reduction to 30,000 (U.S.) troops — rather than for an effective stability and security effort."

The Cordesman report provides a background to President Bush's remarks to reporters Monday that the insurgency is "fading an effect" and that the training of Iraqis has produced only "mixed" results.

According to figures provided by the Pentagon, the number of trained Iraqi army and police units is far below the number required.

For example, as of Dec. 6, the Pentagon reported that 27,000 trained army troops were needed but that only 3,428 were listed as "trained on hand." The figures showed that 135,000 police officers were required but that only 58,798 were "trained on hand."

The Iraqi national guard, which provides security forces to protect buildings and other key facilities, had a better ratio, with 40,115 troops considered "trained on hand" of the required force of 62,000.

Since late summer, Cordesman reports, the insurgents in Iraq have directed their attacks on the growing Iraqi security forces.

Some of the attacks, such as those that took place in Mosul during and after the fighting in Fallujah, highlighted the weaknesses in the U.S. training program. Cordesman reports that "nearly 75 percent of some 4,000 Iraqi forces deserted" during the November attacks.

ACLU claims officers did not take prisoner abuse claims seriously

BY TED BRIDIS

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hundreds of pages of Army records released by the American Civil Liberties Union describe alleged mistreatment of Iraqi citizens by U.S. soldiers that the ACLU charges were not taken seriously by superiors.

The records described one investigation into whether an Army staff sergeant attempted to give a captured Iraqi an old handgun to justify shooting him.

A U.S. soldier said the sergeant, whose name was marked out in the documents, told his troops, "If he grabs this gun, shoot him!"

The Iraqi, a museum guard initially suspected of firing an AK-47 at troops, refused to take the gun, investigators said. "I thought he was going to shoot him," another U.S. soldier told Army investigators later.

The sergeant denied it. "I can understand they may have misinterpreted what I said to the detainee," he told investigators, "but if they said I was trying to give the detainee the weapon or said to shoot him, then they are lying."

Another soldier described the sergeant who was investigated as a good soldier. "If someone was shooting at one of my soldiers, I would be upset also," this soldier said. He added that, "This is getting carried away. We don't know what our role is in Iraq."

The ACLU, given the documents under the Freedom of Information Act, said the government reports illustrated troubling patterns of alleged abuses that weren't taken seriously. "These kinds of crimes should not simply be brushed under the rug," said ACLU Executive Director Antho-

ny Romero.

The latest disclosures about alleged mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners followed reports earlier this week that military interrogators at the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, some posing as FBI agents, humiliated and abused detainees, including inserting lit cigarettes in their ears.

President Bush expects full investigations into all reports of prisoner abuse, a spokesman said Tuesday.

"The president expects that if there are allegations of abuse, that those allegations need to be taken seriously," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. "People need to be held accountable and brought to justice if they're involved in wrongdoing, and that preventive measures are put in place to prevent it from happening again."

Army spokesman Col. Joseph Caprin said the document released by the ACLU is indicative that the Army takes seriously any allegation of detainee abuse. Any allegation will be investigated.

The reports said one U.S. soldier, whose name was marked out on documents, fatally shot an Iraqi prisoner in September 2003 in Tikrit. The soldier was reduced to the lowest rank possible and discharged from the Army in the shooting.

Army criminal investigators determined there was probable cause to charge the soldier with murder and send him to court-martial.

But he was charged and punished administratively for voluntary manslaughter, the documents showed.

It was unclear if the military had ever acknowledged this prisoner death before.

"This is getting carried away. We don't know what our role is in Iraq."

Unidentified soldier, in pages of Army's Iraqi prisoner abuse reports



Left: Sgt. Shelley Landry, right, and Spc. Selina Ray, center, of the 256th Brigade Combat Team, help decorate the dining facility at Butler Range, a relatively isolated base where 10 members of the 256th will be assigned for Christmas.

Below left: Mustafa, who did not give his last name, is an 8-year-old Iraqi boy whose father works at Butler Range.

PHOTOS BY
JOSEPH GORDONO
Stars and Stripes

Serving up Christmas where it's needed

BY JOSEPH GORDONO
Stars and Stripes

BUTLER RANGE COMPLEX, Iraq — Soldiers of the 256th Brigade Combat Team are working to ensure all their comrades, especially those at relatively isolated locations outside the main camps, get a taste of the holiday spirit.

This week, a group of officers and enlisted soldiers flew by helicopter from Camp Liberty (formerly Victory North) to Butler Range, bearing gifts, decorations, mail and well wishes for a small detachment of 256th soldiers assigned there for the holidays.

The range, a small, wind-swept training camp a few hours' drive from Liberty, is staffed by small detachments from various units in the area. Ten soldiers from the 256th will be there for Christmas, before rotating back to Liberty at the end of a 30-day stint.

"They can't make it to us for Christmas, so we're making sure we bring a little bit of it to them," said Col. John Angeloz, deputy brigade commander for support.

At Camp Liberty, the 256th will throw a big party — complete with traditional Louisiana food and music. The brigade's 3,000 soldiers, mostly from Louisiana, are mak-

ing arrangements to transport fresh, hot meals to Butler Range for Christmas. Normally, soldiers there eat T-rations or Meals, Ready to Eat.

"It's not much, but I don't really need much," Sgt. Josh Louviere, 22, from Breaux Bridge, La., said of Butler Range.

The camp hasn't been hit by mortars or rockets, he said, and there's just enough entertainment around to pass the time. What he'll miss most for the holidays is the gumbo his grandmother makes every Christmas Eve.

The dining facility at Camp Liberty will be serving gumbo, he noted, just as it did for Thanksgiving.

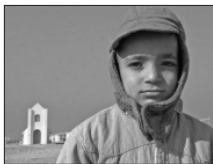
"But something tells me it won't be quite as good," Louviere said.

Like the other 256th soldiers at Butler Range, Spc. Derrick Jefferson, a 25-year-old from Boyce, La., splits his 12-hour workdays between six hours of manning a checkpoint and six hours of doing other jobs on the camp.

More than any of his family's Christmas traditions, Jefferson will simply miss his family. Especially his kids.

"It's not bad," he said of Butler and the holiday plans. "It could be better, but it's not bad."

Spc. Selina Ray, a 22-year-old supply sol-



dier from Broussard, La., was one of the soldiers bringing the gifts and decorations. At Camp Liberty, she'll try to re-create some of her family's Christmas traditions.

She has a small Christmas tree in her room and plans to open her gifts on Christmas Eve, just as she would at home.

"Other than that, I'm sure it won't really feel the same," she said, as she and a young Iraqi boy strung lights on a plastic tree in the Butler Range chow hall.

"I might try and do a Web cam with my family," Ray said, "but for sure I'll give them a call."

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Spc. Selina Ray of the 256th Brigade Combat Team decorates a Christmas tree at Butler Range with the help of a young Iraqi boy.

Family get offers of help to access son's e-mail

WIXOM, Mich. — Offers of help have been pouring in for a Michigan man who is trying to persuade online giant Yahoo! to allow him access to the e-mail account of his son, a Marine killed in Iraq.

From lawyers to computer-code crackers, people across the nation have come forward wanting to help the family of 20-year-old Justin M. Ellsworth, who was killed last month during a foot patrol in Iraq.

"Oh, my God. It's been incredible," said John Ellsworth, Justin's father. "It's an overwhelming response... Things are really moving. I'm very encouraged by it all, but I still have my reservations."

Yahoo! is standing by its policy of protecting the privacy of its e-mail subscribers, spokeswoman Karen Mahon said.

One man started an online petition Tuesday to pressure Yahoo! to allow access to the account. Lawyers have offered free legal services and other people have offered money to help the family pay costs they might incur. Two computer forensic examiners have offered to crack the mystery of the e-mail password for free.

The policy of Yahoo! is to erase the entire account after it has been idle for 90 days. It's not known when Ellsworth last used the account. He died Nov. 3, meaning the account would have been erased by Feb. 1.

From The Associated Press

World's largest candy cane maker a hit in Iraq

BY ELLIOTT MINOR

The Associated Press

ALBANY, Georgia — Bobs Candies, which bills itself as the world's largest candy cane maker, gets regular feedback from customers who relish the sweet taste of its candies at Christmas and the rest of the year.

But company officials were surprised when they received a letter that said America's traditional holiday candy is also a big hit with U.S. soldiers and the children of Iraq.

Mary Helen Dykes, secre-

tary-treasurer of the privately held company, said she didn't know how the soldiers got their first batch of Bobs' candy canes, but after receiving the letter the company sent 3,000 more.

"He told us how they enjoyed them and said they were great to pass out to the kids," she said.

To show their appreciation, some of the children provided the soldiers with information on "bad guys," she said.

Bobs, which was on the verge of bankruptcy only two years ago, has surged back with 300 different types of candies, such as pina-

colada, blueberry, strawberry and hot cinnamon candy canes.

At one time, peppermint candy canes accounted for the bulk of the Bobs' business. But with the addition of new products, canes now account for about half of the company's sales and its year-around candies make up the rest.

Like other U.S. candy companies, Bobs has faced increased competition from sweets made in China and South America. "They're cheaper, but we know we have better quality and taste," said Julie Roth, Bobs vice president.

Air ambulance unit back in Germany

After 11 months in Iraq, 45th Medical Company returns home for holiday

By STEVE LIEWER
Stars and Stripes

KATTERBACH, Germany — Little Eduardo Rivera III just couldn't wait till his papa came home.

The 9-pound, 4-ounce boy was born at 2:10 a.m. Tuesday, just one day before his father — Sgt. Eduardo Rivera Jr. of the 45th Medical Company — arrived home to Katterbach from an 11-month tour in Iraq.

Eduardo III was much too little to brave the German winter for Wednesday's homecoming, but his four sisters showed up to meet their dad. So did his mother, Tanya Rivera, who talked the doctors into letting her out of the hospital so soon after delivering.

"I begged them to let me go, so I could come here and see him," Tanya Rivera said. "We're going to see [the baby] today. We hope he'll be home by Christmas."

"It's been tiring, frustrating," Sgt. Rivera said. "I wanted to get back home for my daughters."

The Riveras were among more than 100 families that got an early Christmas gift Wednesday when the air ambulance unit returned home ahead of schedule. Better still, the company did so without a combat loss.

The company spent most of its deployment in Taji, a bombed-out former Iraqi air force base north of Baghdad. During the year, the unit flew more than 3,823 patients on 2,500 medical evacuation missions. Its UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters racked up 4,550 flight hours.

"It hasn't really sunk in that we're home," said Maj. Christopher Knapp, the company commander.

That the deployment ended well did not mean soldiers and their families found it easy to endure. Stephanie Corr had to cope alone with repeated visits to the hospital after her daughter Alisa, 3, was diagnosed with epilepsy.

"That's been the hardest part," she said.

Earl Rhoden, a former soldier now serving in the Army Reserve, held two balloons and a red rose as he waited for his wife, Sgt. Latoya Rhoden. They've been together for 10 years,



Sgt. Sean Smedley of the 45th Medical Company hugs daughter Mackenzie, 3, after the unit returned to its home base of Katterbach, Germany, on Wednesday. The air ambulance unit had been deployed to Taji, Iraq, since January.

and married for two.

"This is our first deployment split-up," he said. "It's been a challenge, but we survived."

Capt. Tress Van Heusen of the 235th Base Support Battalion in nearby Ansbach predicted that the 45th Medical's return will boost spirits in Katterbach. Most of the soldiers belong to the 1st Infantry Division's aviation brigade, which remained in Iraq but is expected home within the next three months.

Sonia Martin
wife of Sgt. Donald Martin

"It's good for the community," she said. "Everybody sees the light at the end of the tunnel."

And just in time for the holidays.

"We're really glad they're going to be home for Christmas," said Sonia Martin, who brought sons Phillip, 13, and Lawrence, 11, to greet their dad, Sgt. Donald Martin. "That's the best present."

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Sgt. 1st Class Vito DiChristina of the 45th Medical Company was one of more than 100 soldiers and officers that returned to Katterbach after an 11-month deployment to Iraq.

At 53, recall by Marines is 'important' to Pa. man

By CAROLYN KASTNER
The Associated Press

LEBANON, Pa. — At age 53, retired Marine Col. Frank Ryan is going back to duty to serve in Iraq. The accountant with 32 years of active and reserve military duty got a phone call from the Marine Corps' manpower office in August.

Officials wanted to see if he would come out of retirement to serve in Iraq.

Could he pass the physical? Was he interested? Yes, he said, he would be ready to go. "Being able to be part of this is very important to me," he explained.

On Nov. 3, his orders came in the mail, marked "Involuntary Presidential Select Recall." This was no longer a courtesy call.

He would deploy on Dec. 5 to serve as deputy chief of the multinational force in Iraq. Ryan's assignment: to be responsible to the chief of staff and commanding general to coordinate the planning and operations of ground forces.

In preparation for deployment, Ryan started jogging four times a week to lose the 20 pounds he had gained while running unsuccessfully for a congressional seat in central Pennsylvania.

He had to close his accounting business temporarily and refer his current clients. He had to finish landscaping the front yard.

One of the hardest parts of the deployment for Ryan was stopping the adoption of a baby girl from China. And he had to prepare his four grown children and his wife, Sherrie. He was going into Iraq early.

Ryan joined the Marines as soon as he turned 18, at the height of the Vietnam War.

His son, Matthew Ryan, 22, enlisted with the Pennsylvania National Guard right out of high school. He will be commissioned in May and he graduates from Penn State. He has chosen the infantry and expects to be sent to Iraq.

In the period before his deployment, Ryan prepared himself mentally for combat.

"I tell this to any of my young Marines: You are going into a different world and have to be prepared for just about anything," he said. "They can't afford to take anything for granted."

Another aspect of mental preparation is what he calls "personnel accountability."

"It is real easy to wake up in the morning and say, 'four kids, my wife, three dogs, I'm covered,'" he said. "Now I need to know where everybody is every second of the day, and ... You can't take your eye off of one person once. Real leadership is defined by your ability to care for others."

GIs with combat experience offered recruiting deal

By LISA BURGESS
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Army is offering soldiers with combat experience two weeks temporary duty in the recruiting station closest to their own hometown to help recruit new members.

And to sweeten the pot, once their recruiting obligations are completed, soldiers can take personal leave, "as long as their commander approves" the extra time off, said Julia Bobick, a spokeswoman for the Army's recruiting command at Fort Knox, Ky.

But soldiers can't take advantage of the deal while they are still deployed, because of the costs of bringing people back to the United States from places such as Iraq, Bobick said in a Tuesday telephone interview.

Neither can soldiers who are stationed overseas use the new program as a way to get a free trip home, Bobick said.

But if a soldier is enlisted, stationed in the United States, is 25 years old or younger, and has served overseas in support of Operations Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom, he or she can apply for the Special Recruiter Assistance Program, or SRAP, arrangement, Bobick said.

In fiscal 2004, which ended in September, the Army National Guard missed its recruiting target of 56,000 new soldiers by nearly 7,000 enlistees, or more than 12 percent.

The active Army recruited 77,587 soldiers, or 100.8 percent of its goal, according to the Army's Recruiting Command.

For the Army Reserve, the command recruited 21,278 soldiers, or 100.4 percent of its goal.

The goal for fiscal 2005 is to bring in 80,000 new soldiers for the Active Army and 22,175 soldiers for the Army Reserve.

As of Nov. 29, the last date for which numbers were available, recruiters had signed up 13,767 new soldiers for active duty and 2,292 new soldiers for the Reserve.

During the 14-day recruiting duty, soldiers "have to put in a full 40-hour week" working with personnel in the recruiting station, Bobick said.

After an orientation by the battalion public affairs officer, soldiers in the program may be called on to speak at college and community events, or participate in interviews with local media, Bobick said.

Soldiers can claim reimbursement for travel expenses and will receive per diem for their temporary duty assignment time.

Not everyone who applies may get accepted into the program, Bobick said.

Applicants must be screened, which takes about a week, and the first lieutenant colonel up their chain of command must sign their applications, Bobick said.

To apply for SRAP, go to the U.S. Army Recruiting Command's Web site at www.usarec-army.mil, or call (502) 626-0448/1582.

E-mail Lisa Burgess at: burgess@strips.com

Study: Removal of Navy officers on rise

Lead investigator finds commanding officers punished for personal misconduct cases

BY LEO SHANE III

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The number of Navy officers removed from command has risen dramatically, but a series of personal failings was to blame, rather than a problem with the promotions system, investigators said Wednesday.

The Navy's lead investigator noted that personal misconduct cases — things such as sexual improprieties and alcohol abuse — have accounted for the sharp rise.

From 1999 to 2002, only eight commanding officers were "detached for cause" due to personal behavior. Over the following 18 months, until June 2004, 19 officers were punished for those failings.

Overall, 38 commanding officers, about 1.5 percent of the Navy's non-flag commanders, were detached from January 2003 to June 2004. Only 37 had been removed from command in the previous four years.

The Navy study, released Wednesday, dismisses major operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as factors in the increase, noting the service always holds its se-

nior members "to the highest of personal and professional standards."

Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John D. Nathman echoed those statements, saying he was pleased the investigation found no systemic problems in the chain of command.

"A commanding officer's duties are to complete a mission successfully and to provide the conditions of success," he said. "The behavior of a commanding officer must be proper. It implies you have to lead by example."

Nathman said many of the personal behavior failings have occurred just before or immediately following deployment, which he thinks might show officers "letting their guard down" before and after missions.

Navy investigators noted that since June, only two officers have been removed from command, which they see as a sign the 18-month increase was just an anomaly.

But the report does recommend instituting a refresher course on behavior and responsibilities for all commanding officers, developing a self-assessment

tool for commanders to monitor their actions, and creating a peer evaluation tool to provide another performance perspective to the commanders.

In addition to unprofessional conduct, officers can have their command stripped for failing to complete a mission, demonstrating poor leadership skills, or having a catastrophic event, such as a ship or plane crash, happen on their watch.

Of the personal misconduct cases reviewed by investigators, eight in the last four years were related to alcohol abuse, including several drunken driving arrests. In the last two years, 13 involved sexual misconduct, including five related to sexual harassment or assault, and two related to computer pornography.

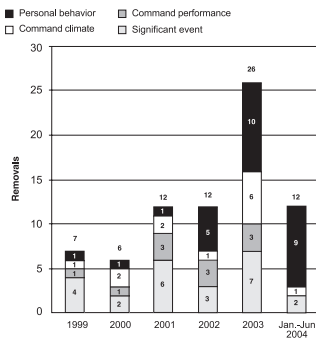
The lead investigator said he found no connection between the detachments and where the commanding officers served, their command history or their level of training.

Nathman said several of the report recommendations have already been put in place, and he expects to see the rest enacted in the near future.

E-mail Leo Shane at: shane@stripes.osd.mil

A growing problem

The Navy has completed a five-year study of cases where an officer has been "detached for cause." Released Wednesday, the study shows a sharp increase in officers relieved of command, many for personal behavior issues, such as sexual misconduct and alcohol abuse.



Source: U.S. Navy, Naval Inspector General

Stars and Stripes

Air Force grounds Raptor flights after Nevada crash

The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Flights of a next-generation stealth fighter were grounded nationwide Tuesday while investigators at Nellis Air Force Base combed the wreckage of one that crashed during testing, the Air Force said.

The pilot of the F/A-22 Raptor ejected shortly before the crash Monday and was taken to a hospital.

He was not seriously injured, said Capt. Maureen Schumann, an Air Force spokeswoman. Schumann said Raptors nationwide have been temporarily prohibited from flying while the crash, the first of an Air Force F/A-22, is investigated.

It was not immediately known what caused the crash or when the planes would resume flying, she said.

All flights at Nellis were also temporarily grounded.

It was the second crash involving a fighter at Nellis in as many months, Schumann said. A Navy F-18 went down Nov. 9 just north of the base.

The pilot of that aircraft also ejected.

The Raptor crash comes at a critical time for the costly F/A-22 program, which is in operational trials intended to lead to deployment with combat units.

There have been many questions raised about the need for

the program and the cost of the planes — \$135 million.

Unlike its predecessor, the F-15 Eagle, the F/A-22 can fly at supersonic speeds for long ranges.

1st Cav Units
US Armed Forces

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IN THE STATES

Snow precedes bitter cold in Midwest

BY KIMBERLY HEFFLING

The Associated Press

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — A foot or more of snow was possible in parts of Indiana and Ohio as a storm spanning the nation's midsection arrived in the region Wednesday, and motorists already were sliding off roads.

Snow was falling from New Mexico, where some schools were closed, to the lower Great Lakes.

The snow marked the leading edge of bitterly cold air flowing southward. Highs only in the teens were forecast Wednesday in the northern Texas Panhandle, where wind chills on Thursday could be as low as 15 below zero, the National Weather Service said.

At the northern extreme of the cold air mass, International Falls, Minn., the temperature fell from 8 below zero at midnight to 20 below by midmorning, the weather service said.

Eight inches of snow had fallen by late morning in the hilly terrain southwestern Indiana, where



The U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker Neah Bay is framed by ice covered trees along the shore of Lake Erie on Monday. Brisk winds and snow-freezing temperatures are following a snowstorm that could dump up to a foot of snow on parts of northeast Ohio.

Evansville recorded only 7 inches all of last winter, and police reported numerous vehicles sliding off slippery roads.

In central Indiana, snow was more than 7 inches deep at Columbus and county government offices were closed because roads

were hazardous.

Through Thursday, snowfall totals could reach a foot in parts of southern Indiana, meteorologists said.

But for western Ohio, forecasts were upgraded because cold air was moving in faster than expected

Dad helps deliver baby on snowy N.C. highway

GREENVILLE, N.C. — Jennifer Sneed was packed and ready for the trip to a hospital to have her baby this week, but she wasn't ready for a snowstorm.

Sneed went into labor, and she and her husband, Jerry, headed from their eastern North Carolina town of Washington to a hospital 20 miles to the east in Greenville.

Just after 1 a.m. Monday, Gerry Sneed called Pitt County 911, telling the dispatcher his wife said the baby was coming out and they were still on the snowy highway. "Well, stop. We need you to help deliver the baby, then," the operator said. Gerry Sneed stopped the car right in the middle of the highway. Madison Sneed was born at 1:47 a.m. Monday.

Mother and child came home from the hospital Tuesday. It was on the same road that their 5-year-old son Dereck was killed in a car wreck last year. "My little boy was buried [in] the last snowfall of last season," Jennifer Sneed said. "Madison was born the first snowfall of this season. So we say it was a blessing from God and our little boy that she came when she did."

From wire reports

and rain was turning to snow more quickly. "Some locations will make a hard run to 20 inches," meteorologist Mike Ryan said in Wilmington.

The precipitation was moving toward the east, and rain and snow

were possible Thursday from the Gulf of Mexico into New England.

To the west, up to 6 inches of snow was possible in parts of northern Texas, and a weather alert was issued for airlines at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

High court hears arguments in Wash. recount dispute

The Associated Press

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Lawyers battling over the fate of hundreds of mistakenly rejected ballots in Washington's astounding close governor's race made their arguments before the state Supreme Court on Wednesday.

Republican Dino Rossi won the election by 261 votes, then won a machine recount by 42 votes out of 2.9 million ballots cast.

Democrats paid for a hand recount,

which currently has Rossi 49 votes ahead of Democrat Christine Gregoire.

But late Tuesday, Paul Berendt, state Democratic Party chairman, said preliminary results of the hand recount gave Gregoire an eight-vote edge — and the lead for the first time.

Wednesday morning, the high court considered whether King County — the state's largest and a stronghold for Gregoire — should be allowed to add to the recount 73 ballots that weren't counted originally be-

cause of mistakes by county election workers. State law says county canvassing boards can reconsider votes when there is "an apparent discrepancy or an inconsistency in the returns."

A Pierce County Superior Court judge on Friday granted the state Republican Party's motion for a temporary restraining order to stop King County from counting the newly discovered ballots. King County, the state Democratic Party and the secretary of state appealed that ruling.

Unless the Pierce County order is reversed, Democrats argued, voters will be disenfranchised through no fault of their own.

Republicans countered that the real harm would be if the newly discovered ballots are allowed to be counted so long after the election.

Thomas Ahearne, a lawyer for the secretary of state's office, told justices that state law allows canvassing boards to fix errors caused by election staff.

Bush holds his first meeting with NAACP

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President George W. Bush met Tuesday at the White House with the outgoing head of the NAACP, the first meeting of his presidency with the nation's oldest civil rights group.

"It was a very frank and a very open dialogue," NAACP President Kweisi Mfume told reporters afterward. "We both have real differences."

White House press secretary Scott McClellan described the session as "a good discussion about a wide range of issues."

"The president has a long

record of reaching out to the African American community, and he will continue to build upon those efforts," McClellan said.

The meeting came after NAACP President Kweisi Mfume sent Bush a letter on Nov. 5 congratulating him on his re-election and requesting the chance to discuss challenges confronting the nation, said John White, the group's spokesman. Mfume announced Nov. 30 he is stepping down from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People leadership post.

The "surprise invitation" to meet with Bush came from the

White House late last week, White said.

The meeting comes after a period of chilly relations between the White House and the NAACP — and after Bush failed to improve on his performance among black voters in the November elections, winning support from only about one in 10.

Earlier this year, Bush refused an invitation to speak at the group's annual convention. Though he had addressed the 2000 convention when he was first running for president, Bush has declined each year of his presidency, becoming the first president since Herbert Hoover to do so.

Slain pregnant woman laid to rest in Missouri

The Associated Press

MARYVILLE, Mo. — Crying and exchanging hugs, mourners said goodbye to a mother-to-be who was strangled and whose baby was cut from her womb. Hundreds gathered in this small northwestern Missouri town for the service, the crowd filling the funeral home.

"I don't know what to say," the Rev. Harold Hamon told mourners Tuesday. "This is one of those times where you can't figure it out at all and words fail."

Bobbie Jo Stinnett, 23, was eight months pregnant when her mother found her in a pool of blood in her Skidmore home Thursday, the baby she was carrying missing.

Lisa M. Montgomery, 36, of Melvern, Kan. — a woman Stinnett knew from dog breeding and shows — has been charged with kidnapping resulting in death.

The child, named Victoria Jo Stinnett, spent the weekend in a hospital before going home Monday afternoon with her father and another relative.

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Kingdom of Bahrain

2 Fannie Mae executives forced out

BY MARTIN CRUTSINGER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Fannie Mae, the nation's second-largest financial institution, forced out two top executives as it struggles to deal with an accounting scandal which will likely force it to wipe out \$9 billion in profits over the past four years.

Fannie Mae chief executive Franklin Raines and J. Timothy Howard, the company's chief financial officer, stepped down Tuesday after lengthy negotiations between the Fannie Mae board and the company's chief government regulator, the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight, or OFHEO.

In a statement issued late Tuesday night, Raines said he had decided to leave to fulfill a pledge

Shake-up comes as mortgage giant struggles with accounting scandal

he made during congressional testimony in October that he would take the blame if serious accounting problems were found at the company.

"By my early retirement, I have held myself accountable," Raines said.

A Fannie Mae statement announced that Howard had also resigned. The company said it had hired an executive search firm to find replacements for the men.

The management shake-up was having a beneficial impact on the company's stock price as investors responded to signs that the Fannie Mae board was moving aggressively to deal with the company's problems. Fannie Mae stock rose \$2.26, or 3.2 percent, to \$72.61 in midmorning Wednesday.

Industry and congressional sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Fannie Mae's board had been pressured by OFHEO during tense negotiations over the past several days to demand the resignations of both Raines and Howard.

OFHEO Director Armando Falcon Jr. said in a statement that his agency had determined that Fannie Mae, the biggest player in the nation's \$8 trillion mortgage market, had been left "significantly undercapitalized" because of its accounting problems.

A review by the Securities and Exchange Commission determined last week that Fannie Mae must restate earnings back to 2001 because it violated account-

ing rules for derivatives — financial instruments used to hedge against interest-rate swings — and for some prepaid loans.

That restatement of earnings is likely to wipe out \$9 billion — or about one-third — of Fannie Mae's profits — since 2001.

Fannie Mae, long a Wall Street darling, is the biggest buyer and guarantor of home mortgage loans in the United States and is the country's second-largest financial institution behind Citigroup Inc.

The problems at Fannie Mae were similar to accounting difficulties encountered by its smaller competitor, Freddie Mac, which emerged from its own accounting scandal and executive shake-up after disclosing in June 2003 it had misstated earnings by \$5 billion.

Judge in AOL spam case rejects plea

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — A federal judge refused to accept a guilty plea Tuesday from a former America Online software engineer accused of stealing 92 million e-mail addresses and selling them to spammers.

Judge Alvin Hellerstein of Manhattan federal court said he was not convinced Jason Smathers, 24, had actually committed a crime under new federal "can-spy" legislation that took effect earlier this year.

Smathers, of Harpers Ferry, W.Va., planned to enter guilty pleas to charges of conspiracy and interstate transportation of stolen property.

But the judge turned him away and scheduled another hearing for January.

Under a plea deal, Smathers faced a potential prison term of 18 months to two years, plus fines.

The judge said it was not clear that Smathers had deceived anyone — a requirement of the law.

Federal prosecutor David Siegal urged the judge to accept Smathers' guilty plea, saying "billions and billions of unsolicited e-mails" had been sent to "people like your Honor" because of Smathers' conduct.

Hellerstein set a new hearing date for Jan. 28.

Fuel tanker truck crashes, explodes near Pentagon

The Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. — A fuel tanker truck crashed near the Pentagon early Wednesday causing multiple explosions and temporarily shutting down a portion of the roadway.

Arlington County authorities

said the driver was killed in the accident, but Virginia State Police, who are heading the investigation, would not officially confirm the fatality.

"You can't even recognize it anymore — it's basically a pile of steel," Arlington County Chief Fire Marshal Carol Saulnier said

of the truck's condition.

The accident happened around 3:40 a.m. on the Washington Boulevard exit ramp off Interstate 395. Police believe the truck driver lost control as he was entering the ramp and hit a guardrail. The vehicle then rolled over and caught fire.

"We had flames probably about 50 feet in the air," said Captain Tom Polera, Arlington County Assistant Fire Marshal.

Police said there is no link with terrorism.

The fuel leaked into the storm drains, causing a series of small manhole fires, fire officials said.

Message for our men and women in uniform...

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IN THE WORLD

Tanzanian acquitted in embassy bombing

BY SUKHEV CHHATBAR

The Associated Press

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania — A High Court judge on Wednesday found a Tanzanian businessman innocent of conspiracy to commit murder in the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in the East African nation.

Judge Emiliano Mushi ordered the immediate release of Rashid Saleh Hemed, 34, who was charged in connection with the terror attack that killed 12 people and was blamed on Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network. A nearly simultaneous blast at the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, the capital of neighboring Kenya, killed 219 people, including 12 Americans.

"You cannot convict someone with doubtful evidence," Mushi told the court, after declaring that prosecutors failed to prove beyond doubt that Hemed was involved in the plot.

Prosecutors said that they would not appeal the ruling. "I am not surprised with the judgment because I knew I was not guilty right from the beginning," Hemed said while walking

out of the court.

Hemed, a car parts dealer, was the first person charged in connection with the Aug. 7, 1998, attacks in Tanzania and Kenya. His trial began in 2000.

In 2001, four men were convicted in New York of conspiracy to carry out the bombings and sentenced to life in prison. In Kenya, three men are on trial for allegedly taking part in a series of al-Qaida attacks, including the U.S. Embassy bombing.

Hemed initially was charged with 11 counts of murder in September 1998, but the charges were later reduced to conspiracy to commit murder. One person died from injuries after the charges were brought. Hemed pleaded innocent to the charges.

In February, three court assessors declared Hemed innocent, but under Tanzanian law, the presiding judge makes the final ruling.

The prosecution called 18 witnesses during the trial, including three FBI agents who testified last month that traces of bomb-making chemicals similar to those used in the bombing



Tanzanian national Rashid Saleh Hemed, center, accompanied with his relatives, Kassim Juma Abdallah, left, and Nazir V. Mohammed, arrives at the Tanzanian High Court in Dar es Salaam on Wednesday.

U.S. Consulate in Indonesia closed

The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — The U.S. Embassy said Wednesday that its consulate in the Indonesian city of Surabaya would be closed for the rest of the year due to security concerns and staff shortages.

On Saturday, the U.S. State Department warned that Islamic terrorists were planning more attacks against Western targets in Indonesia over Christmas and New Year. It reiterated advice to its citizens not to travel to the country.

The state department's advisory followed similar warnings by foreign governments earlier this week that militants belonging to the al-Qaida-linked Jemaah Islamiyah terror group were plotting more bombings.

were found on Hemed's clothes.

But defense attorneys argued that Hemed's clothes were mixed with those belonging to other people, including those belonging to Ahmed Khalifan Ghailani, a Tan-

zanian captured in Pakistan on July 25 with 13 other foreigners after a shootout in the eastern city of Gujarat. Ghailani was indicted by a New York court in December 1998 for his role in the attack.

EU orders Microsoft to divulge secrets

The Associated Press

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Union struck at the commercial backbone of Microsoft's global software empire on Wednesday — forcing the company for the first time to strip its Windows platform of a popular feature to give competitors a better shot at success.

An EU court ruled that Microsoft Corp. must immediately divulge some trade secrets to competitors and produce a version of its flagship Windows operating system without the program that plays music and video.

The 91-page ruling thwarts Microsoft's attempt to delay, pending appeal, implementation of the EU's landmark antitrust decision in March that demanded changes in the software giant's business practices.

The company said it would start shipping Windows without its digital Media Player within weeks so it will be on sale as an alternative to the full Windows program by February.



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OPINION

Pins on our lapels and hearts on our sleeves

BY RICK ATKINSON

One morning in 1966, when I was an eighth-grader at Gen. George S. Patton Jr. Junior High School at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., we were mustered onto the playground in a formation of huge block letters that spelled: WE BACK YOU. A helicopter appeared overhead, and a photographer leaned from the cockpit. The subsequent photograph, published in a newspaper, was meant to inspire the troops in Vietnam.

As the sons and daughters of professional Army officers, our impulse was to close ranks and stand where we were told to stand. For us the affirmation was not political, it was personal. We tried not to confuse the warriors with the war.

Yet over the years as the war dragged on, the dead stacked up and the country splintered, that distinction became harder to sustain. The suspicion that our soldiers were risking their lives in a bad, lost cause soon became so searing that many of us insisted the war was righteous and winnable. To admit otherwise felt like a betrayal of those we loved; it also implied that we had been duped. We closed ranks with the policy as well as with the troops. We conflated the warriors and the war. So did the country, in what became toxic.

Today the equivalent of "We back you" slogans can be found on military posts across the country, expressed in yellow ribbons and lapel pins and yard signs supporting the troops in Iraq. In a relatively small, volunteer Army, the agony of 1,300 dead and 10,000 wounded sears some communities



A U.S. Marine walks beneath a tangle of electrical wiring during a foot patrol in Ramadi, Iraq, on Sunday. For some in the States, keeping the warriors and the war untangled is hard.

more than others, and none more than the extended family that is the professional military.

Many feel a profound disquiet: at the hard truth that the central provocations for invading Iraq proved spurious; at the stress fractures appearing within the Army and Marine Corps — great armies are hard to build and easy to break; at the death of meaningful allied support in a robust coalition of the capable rather than a thin amalgam of the willing; and at the risk of another rift opening between the military and our larger republic.

Soldiers and their families also know, viscerally, that war is corrupting, even a justifiable or inevitable war. Eventually combat does bad things to good soldiers. Not that it makes them capable of atrocity — the overwhelming majority today are too balanced, too professional, too well led for that, although the rash of soldiers and Marines court-martialed or under investigation for various depredations in Iraq is unnerving. But war is corrosive of decency and nobility; it tarnishes the spirit. Perhaps the best example is Wilfred Owen, the great English poet who commanded a platoon in World War I.

Shortly before his death near the end of that war, Owen described sorting through incoming mail to his soldiers who had just been killed. "My senses are charred," he wrote. "I don't take the cigarette out of my mouth when I write Deceased over their letters."

Since before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, military communities both the active and reserve forces have closed ranks. For them, their core affirmation is again personal, not political, although they instinctively and legally follow the military hierarchy and the commander in chief. The senior officers among them, by tradition and training, offer their best advice on tactics and strategy, then how to the decisions of their superiors.

But as this war grinds on, as these dead stack up, soldiers and their families are faced with the appalling suspicion that their troops are risking their lives in a cause that is uncertain at best and illegitimate at worst. While some voice private doubts, others insist — often with increasing stridency — that the war is justified, that the insurgency can be crushed and that naysaying undermines both national will and troop morale. I admire their steadfast faith, even as I recognize the dilemma. To disbelieve seems too much like betrayal. Skepticism and dissent appear inimical to service and sacrifice.

Keeping the warriors and the war untangled is extraordinarily difficult, intellectually and emotionally. All that most of us can do is to mean precisely what we say: We back you.

Rick Atkinson, a former staff writer for The Washington Post (where this column first appeared), is the author of "An Army at Dawn" and "In the Company of Soldiers."

Peterson gateway to real news remained closed

There are times when it's utterly humiliating to be a working journalist. This is one of those times.

Media fixation (OK, partial media fixation, to be precise) with the Scott Peterson case was, or should have been, an embarrassment to all Americans, journalists and nonjournalists alike.

For the cable news networks and the tabloids, Peterson's trial presented a free key to a Treasury Department printing press — an unfettered opportunity to profit from titillation by scandal-mongering, shock-schlock journalism of the lowest caliber. Sadler yet, it was a missed opportunity to teach American news consumers something of value about an issue that may actually touch their lives.

There was something about the Peterson case that could have been reported, but rarely if ever was, that might have helped people. Laci Peterson was hardly alone as a pregnant woman murdered by a spouse or partner. She may have been somewhat unusual (so it seemed), poster-girl pretty and apparently in what was trumpeted to all the world as a blissful union with Scott.

But the gruesome truth is, she was emblematic of a terrible (and preventable) trend in American life. Studies have shown that a leading cause of death among pregnant women is homicide committed by a spouse or partner. And despite having lived through two years of Scott Peterson's inhabiting our living rooms, too few Americans learned this while watching his murder trial.

Last year, The Associated Press reported, "Homicide was found to be the leading cause of death for pregnant women in Maryland, according to a March 2001 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association." [N]ationwide, the maternal mortality rate was just 9.9 percent in 1999, the most recent year for which statistics are available.

The AP release continued to say, "The [JAMA] study reinforced at least two earlier studies that found homicide to be the top killer of pregnant women. In Cook County, Ill., 26 percent of the 95 deaths of pregnant women recorded between 1986 and 1989 (were murders). In New York, 25 percent of the 293 deaths among pregnant women between 1987 and 1991 were homicides."

Homicide a leading cause of death for pregnant women? Did the cable channels or tabloids make this clear during the trial? Or were they too busy informing us about Scott

and Amber Frey, or detailing every meaningless personal interaction among the jurors? I fear it's the latter.

A Web site called Grade the News, which monitors San Francisco media, sported one of the more interesting articles I've seen about the Peterson case. It quoted reporters who covered the story and later confessed to experiencing major embarrassment about their chosen life's work. One female reporter was quoted as saying, "I believed, when I started covering this, that it was totally sensationalistic and overcovered and flimsy in terms of affecting people's lives."

Then the Web site added, "More than a year ago, Grade the News surveyed journalists converging on Mr. Peterson's hometown of Modesto for the pretorial hearing. They rated the story moderately interesting, but by and large unimportant."

"One reporter, who asked not to be named, said bluntly: 'It is a shame that we,

as newspaper [reporters] and our friends in the broadcast world, circle around this story in the name of journalism. Few of us care about the story or its implications — lack thereof, I say."

So why do they cover it? Ratings, readership, organizations desperate to grab viewers/readers at any cost. There's little left that's noble about the Fourth Estate (or at least large sections of it). Cable news and tabloid periodicals, if they ever did, certainly do not now have as their raison d'être, to educate Americans to salient facts in the world around them. Or perhaps they do in "tabloid" news periods, in between "Trials of the Century" (of which there have been a half-dozen in the last decade.) What will they do now that Scott Peterson's story is nearing its end? Thank God, they must be saying, there's no shortage of trash news.

Bonnie Erbe is a TV host and writes this column for Scripps Howard News Service.

Bonnie Erbe



Mallard Fillmore

BY BRUCE TINSLEY



Child sex slaves

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Union's new anti-crime commissioner said Wednesday the bloc would step up the fight against human trafficking gangs, which he warned were increasingly targeting children to be sold into sexual slavery.

EU Justice and Security Commissioner Franco Frattini said hundreds of thousands of people had fallen victim to human traffickers in Europe.

"Unfortunately, trafficking in human beings is a low-risk and high-profit enterprise for organized crime," Frattini said at a news conference. "Torture, physical and psychological abuse are commonly used to break the victims' resistance to prostitution."

He said most victims were women between 18 and 30, but warned that intelligence reports showed "there is a trend toward underage victims" of both sexes.

Sabbath discs found

LONDON — Stolen gold and silver discs worth £500,000 of Sir Osbourne's band Black Sabbath were recovered Wednesday after thieves dumped them behind trash cans.

The discs were reported missing last week after a burglary at the home of Osbourne's former manager, Patrick Meehan, in Edenbridge, Kent, southeast England.

Kent Police said an anonymous tip led them to the eight discs, found in a plastic bag dumped behind recycling bins.

Czech draft ends

PRAGUE, Czech Republic — The last Czech conscripts went home Wednesday, ending 140 years of draft in the country, an official said.

Spokesman for the Defense Ministry, Andrej Ctrtek, said the last 1,876 conscripts left their garisons across the Czech Republic on Wednesday morning.

President Vaclav Klaus ratified the bill abolishing the draft last month, allowing the army to become fully professional as of Jan. 1.

The army now will have 23,870 career soldiers and 16,200 civil employees and plans to have 26,200 soldiers and 8,800 other employees by 2011.

Iran arrests 'spies'

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran has arrested military officers, nuclear workers and others on charges of revealing its nuclear secrets to Israeli and U.S. intelligence agencies, Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi said.

Yunesi said the information passed to America and Israel was "without value," state media reported.

The minister said more than 10 suspects were detained in Tehran and in the southern Hormozgan province during the Iranian year that began March 21, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

"These people were spying for Mossad and CIA," IRNA quoted Yunesi as saying. He was referring to Israel's external secret service and the Central Intelligence Agency.

From The Associated Press

Blair wants conference with Palestinians

BY LARA SUKHITIAN
The Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank — British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Wednesday proposed holding a one-day conference in March to help reform and strengthen the Palestinian Authority, billing it as a step toward reviving peace talks stalled by Israeli-Palestinian fighting.

Interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas said he welcomed the idea of the conference, though the Palestinians initially hoped for a broader agenda, including key disputes with Israel over

Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and the borders of a Palestinian state.

Blair told a joint news conference with Abbas that the focus of the London gathering would be narrower — focusing on Palestinian administrative, economic and security reform. He said "final status issues" would have to be left to a later time.

Blair said he hoped the conference would serve as a bridge back to the "road map," the three-stage peace plan that is to culminate in Palestinian statehood.

"My purpose is to give help to

the Palestinian Authority and its people so that we can get back into the road map negotiations toward the two-state solution and the viable Palestinians state at the end of it," Blair said.

The international community long has pushed for Palestinian reform, but made no inroads while Arafat was alive. Abbas has promised to make changes, including streamlining the unwieldy security services.

The London meeting had been talked about for weeks, but Wednesday marked the first time Blair spoke of it in public. Israel has said it supported the gathering but would not attend.

Abbas, who is running to replace Arafat in Jan. 9 elections, said the Palestinians are eager to resume talks with Israel. "We are very keen and very concerned about catching up on the lost time," he said, referring to the deadlock during more than four years of fighting.

Before meeting with Abbas, Blair briefly paid his respects at Arafat's tomb in the courtyard of the late Palestinian leader's headquarters in Ramallah.

Blair walked toward the grave, nodded slightly and then walked on. The Palestinians had hoped Blair would lay a wreath at the tomb.

Russian Soviet-era missile test a success

The Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia successfully test-fired a heavy intercontinental ballistic missile on Wednesday in a launch intended to extend the lifetime of aging Soviet-built weapons.

It was the first time that an RS-20V Voevoda, which NATO identifies as the SS-18 Satan, had been fired from its combat positions in Russia since the 1991 Soviet collapse. Previously, such missiles had been launched from the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan.

The missile, which was launched from a silo in the Sverdlovsk region in the southern Ural Mountains, hit a designated target on a testing ground on the Far East Kamchatka Peninsula, more than 3,750 miles away.

"The main result of the launch was the confirmation of the technical characteristics of the missiles, which have no analogues in the world," Russia's Strategic Missile Forces said in a statement. It added that the missile had been on combat duty for 16 years before the launch.

The Russian strategic forces have conducted regular test launches of Soviet-built ballistic missiles to check their readiness. The post-Soviet funding shortage has left the military struggling to extend the lifetime of Soviet-built missiles, since the government lacks the funds to quickly replace them with new weapons.

Military officials have said that Russia would keep its arsenal of about 150 SS-18s for another 10 to 15 years, even though the missiles already were past their designated lifetime and were to be scrapped this decade under earlier plans.

The heavy missile, capable of slamming 10 individually guided nuclear warheads at targets more than 6,800 miles away, is the heaviest weapon in Russia's inventory. The SS-18 and another multi-warhead missile, the SS-19, have formed the core of the Russian strategic forces since Soviet times.

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Officer suspended

VA VIRGINIA BEACH

A police officer arrested during an alleged drug buy has been suspended from the force.

Jason Todd Armentrout, 30, who is being held without bond in the city jail, was off-duty and not armed when he was taken into custody, police said.

Dion Rimer, a police spokesman, said Armentrout's arrest came after his name surfaced amid a much larger investigation. The probe by the department's Special Investigative Narcotics Unit began almost one year ago.

Its target has been people involved in the possession, sale and distribution of illegal narcotics, specifically Ecstasy and methamphetamine, Rimer said.

Investigators saw Armentrout and other suspects and watched as they attempt to purchase Ecstasy, Rimer said. Armentrout is charged with attempted possession of a controlled substance.

Rare texts, books sold

OH COLUMBUS — A former employee of the Kenyon College library has pleaded guilty to selling 50 rare books and other documents from the school's collection for \$26,000.

David Breithaupt now faces up to two years in prison and a fine of as much as \$250,000, according to the U.S. attorney's office.

Breithaupt, 45, sold most of the items, many of which were more than 100 years old, on eBay to buyers in 19 other states and four foreign countries. The sales took place between 1998 and 2002.

A copy made in 1526 of Ptolemy's "Almagest," an astronomy text originally written in ancient Greece, fetched the highest price at \$4750, court documents said. Several other items sold were from the 15th and 16th centuries. Breithaupt has agreed to pay restitution for recovery of the items.

School can go co-ed

NY AUBURN — A judge has denied a request by two students at Wells College, an all-women liberal arts school, for an injunction to halt the institution's plan to allow men to enroll.

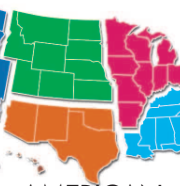
Acting State Supreme Court Justice Peter Cornin said the main issue was the continued survival of the school. The lawsuit is challenging the coed decision on several grounds, including breach of contract.

Ape comes home

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A 23-year-old ape from Buffalo, N.Y., has returned to the San Francisco Zoo, his boyhood home, as the new king of Gorilla World.

In early January, he'll be liberated from quarantine and become the exhibit's top dog, filling a vacancy created in May when Kubi, its longtime patriarch, died. Since then, the four females have been left to their own devices. Anything, or nothing, could happen.

"They've been on their own without a male for a while," said gorilla keeper Gary Kerr. "They might have gotten the independent gene and not want to be dominated anymore. We'll see when he comes over whether his animal magnetism overcomes their inde-



AMERICAN ROUNDUP

pendent streak."

Hole forces evacuation

FL DELTONA — A sinkhole opened beneath a road in central Florida, swallowing four lanes of pavement and forcing the evacuation of 20 homes.

Officials had been watching the hole after noticing collapsed asphalt on a street. Workers were pumping a cement mixture under the damaged road when the hole formed.

"All of the sudden, they started feeling rumblings in the ground," said Robert Rogers, deputy chief of the fire department in Deltona, about 25 miles southwest of Daytona Beach.

The ground opened up, destroying all four lanes. The hole grew to 50 feet deep and at least 150 feet wide.

The sinkhole also threatened to take down a major power line and forced authorities to evacuate 20 homes near the electrical wires.

Toy guns pulled

NY ALBANY — Thousands of toy guns have been pulled from the shelves of costume shops across the state as part of a settlement between the New York attorney general's office and two national wholesalers.

Attorney General Eliot Spitzer had accused the wholesalers of distributing more than 12,000 toy guns in 2001 in violation of a state law that previously applied only to

retailers. Most of the wholesalers dealt with costume and novelty shops.

The state law bans realistic toy guns from being sold in stores unless they have permanent, usually inch-wide orange stripes running down both sides of the barrel.

Without admitting any wrongdoing, Rubie's Costumes Co. agreed to pay \$27,000 in civil penalties and costs and Franco American Novelty Co. agreed to pay \$10,000.

Flight may be abuse

IN BLOOMINGTON — Some Indiana University students could face a hefty fine for tossing a guinea pig from a dormitory window with a makeshift parachute.

The students used a garbage bag, dental floss and masking tape to create a parachute and then dropped the animal, Bloomington Animal Shelter manager Leigh Ann Hoffacker said.

Fortunately, the guinea pig landed in a tree and survived. The trembling rodent was discovered moments later by freshman Laura Robinson.

School janitors were able to reach the animal through a third-floor window and Robinson took it to the shelter.

The identities of the students who tossed the guinea pig have yet to be determined, but Hoffacker said the list has been narrowed down by dorm administration.

Police likely would not do much, she said, but the shelter's animal control office can issue a \$500 ticket for animal abuse.

Cocaine found in wreck

WV WHEELING — Authorities called to the scene of a plane crash found no people — dead or alive — but they did find \$24 million worth of cocaine. Federal authorities were seeking the pilot, identified as Eugene N. Cobbs, a charged with possession with intent to distribute cocaine, U.S. Attorney Thomas E. Johnston.

The Piper Aerostar twin-engine plane crashed in a wooded area near the Wheeling-Ohio County Airport, said James Peters, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration.

Authorities found about 327 pounds of cocaine packaged in blocks and another 193 pounds turned up in the plane's nose compartment, Johnston said. Authorities were searching for a man believed to be Cobbs, who was picked up by a motorist near the airport's front entrance. His forehead was cut and he asked for a ride to a hotel.

Couple pays town's bills

IA ANTHON — Home and business owners in this northwest Iowa town of 650 people were a little shocked at a Christmas gift they got from retired farmer Richard Hamann and his wife, Donna.

The Hamanns doled out \$25,000 to pay the town's electricity bills — all due on Dec. 25.

Hamann, 75, sees the gift as returning a good deed. Residents said they were surprised and grateful.

"I just thought it was great," said Beulah Sands, 64, a clerk at a local convenience store. "I never talked to anyone who didn't appreciate it. It was a wonderful thing for him to do."



Massive reading assignment Jessica Zampella, foreground, and other students at Central Elementary in Oxford, Miss., are sprawled out on the floor as they attempt to collectively read 12,000 pages.



Making kids happy

Salvation Army volunteer Barb Reigelerspiger of Naples, N.Y., tries to fit a few more toys on one of the tables as she sets up for a toy distribution. People who pre-registered could choose five gifts per child, as well as a pair of mittens and stocking-stuffer gifts.



On the way up

A skier takes a ride on the ski lift at Paoli Peaks in Paoli, Ind.



Zamboni explodes

Duluth, Minn., firefighters run hoses to battle a blaze at Peterson Arena in West Duluth after a Zamboni exploded inside the arena.



Jogger's best friends

Lisa Schlimmer jogs with her dogs, Josie, left, and Lacey, at the city playfields in Pullman, Wash. Schlimmer is a student at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Washington State University.



Stacked for fire

Heath Melancon, from Grand Point near Luther, La., trims the last logs on an 18-foot-high bonfire structure on the Mississippi River levee, that will be lit at 7 p.m. Christmas Eve.

Letter finally sent

WI INDEPENDENCE — Jane Matchey recently became better acquainted with the late father she never met after receiving a letter he wrote six decades ago.

When Sgt. Henry Longmier left to fight in World War II, his new wife Teresa was pregnant with Jane, who was born about two months later.

But the 31-year-old soldier was killed by a German sniper in Belgium in the waning days of the Battle of the Bulge on Jan. 25, 1945.

Prior to that, in late 1944, he and three other soldiers lived in a Dutch village for a time in the home of the Neederlants family.

It seems Longmier neglected to mail the letter to his wife in Wisconsin. When the soldiers moved on, a Neederlants family member discovered the letter while cleaning the room they stayed in.

Only recently did the Neederlants' grandson, Lando Mullen, 38, become curious about his intended recipient, having heard stories of the soldiers.

5 arrested on Cape Cod

MA ORLEANS — Five people were arrested and more than \$1.6 million worth of jewelry, paintings and marine equipment was recovered on Cape Cod, authorities said. Police identified those arrested as George Upton, 52, his brother, Frank Upton, 41, and Mark Fornal, 41. Police said they found the paintings behind a fake wall and jewelry in a hollowed-out staircase in Frank Upton's home.

Rage cited in crash

FL LARGO — Two cars raced in a deadly dance of road rage, police said.

The Lexus pulled in front of the Volkswagen and slammed on the brakes. Then the Volkswagen did the same. The leaping continued until the Volkswagen smashed into a utility pole, fatally injuring the driver, Jacquelyn Palfy, 20. Two passengers in her car were injured.

The young man seen driving the Lexus drove away after the crash, police Sgt. Andy Hill said.

Santa Claus shot

CA OXNARD — Police were dispatched to the large Santa Claus statue here after shots were fired at it.

Officers found five bullet holes marring the jolly face of old St. Nick. Five 9 mm casings were lying on the street nearby, police said.

Mike Barber, Santa's caretaker, said the gunshots shattered the lenses on Santa's glasses and broke the frames. He and a friend used screws, glue and wire to patch the frames back together.

The 20-foot, nearly five-ton plaster Santa statue was moved in January 2003 from Santa Barbara County to the lot on Ventura Boulevard. The statue had stood for 50 years on top of a malt shop and candy store near Carpinteria.

Sole witness dies

MD BALTIMORE — The sole witness to the fatal shooting of a civilian police employee in 1974 has died of a heart attack, police said.

Police declined to name the witness and they insisted the death will not affect the prosecution of Michael Hughes, who had been a fugitive for 30 years before his arrest in Boston this fall.

The shooting occurred Christmas Eve 1974 and before the arrest ranked as one of the city's coldest cases. McKinley Johnson Jr. was distributing Christmas food baskets at a west Baltimore bar when he got into an argument with Hughes, police said. The alleged confrontation continued outside the bar where Johnson was shot.

Big garages for big cars

AZ MESA — Now not only is keeping up with the Joneses a daily pressure, but it may become a law.

The town of Gilbert is considering changing its zoning code to set a minimum interior garage size for homes in this southeast Phoenix suburb.

"We drive Suburbans, Excursions and Silverado extended cabs, and they won't fit in small garages," said Planning and Zoning Commission chairwoman Brigitte Peterson at a recent meeting on the proposed land development code.

When recommending the change, town staff told the commission that 74 percent of registered vehicles in Gilbert are trucks or sport utility vehicles.

The current code only requires two enclosed parking spaces and has no size minimum.

Aging center renamed

UT SALT LAKE CITY — The University of Utah is changing the name of its center that focuses on older Americans. The school's Gerontology Center will become the Center on Aging, a change the school says reflects increases in Utah's 65-and-older population.

That group increased 27 percent in the last 10 years, and will rise another 28 percent in the next decade.

Welfare caseloads drop

NJ TRENTON — Worker caseloads at the state's child welfare system have dropped by almost 10 percent since officials began working in July to reform the agency. However, officials said the caseloads still exceed the target set in the reform plan. The Division of Youth and Family Services has a troubled history that includes the deaths of some children and abuse of others who were supposed to be under supervision.

\$100K reward offered

MS JACKSON — An anonymous donor has posted a \$100,000 reward for information leading to murder charges in one of the most notorious crimes of the civil rights era — the "Freedom Summer" slayings of three civil rights workers in 1964.

The reward will be administered by an independent organization as the state renews efforts to bring charges in the killings of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman.

In 1964, the three volunteers helping to register black voters were murdered on a lonely dirt road as they drove to a church to investigate a fire.

Stories and photos from wire services



White Christmas

A Christmas tree stands in the gazebo at Kershaw Park along Canandaigua Lake in Canandaigua, N.Y.

FACES



Princess Diana and Prince Charles

Collectors snatch up royal goods

Collectors of royal family memorabilia bought a 23-year-old piece of wedding cake and magnum of champagne from the marriage of Princess Diana and Prince Charles on Friday.

A royal fanatic paid more than \$2,000 for the magnum of French champagne from the 1981 royal wedding, while a slice of matured wedding cake sold for \$452.

The 1961 vintage Don Perignon — chosen for the year of Diana's birth — was one of 12 magnums bottled in a limited edition for the royal wedding.

It failed to sell at auction earlier this week, but the collector from northern England called the auction house Friday and agreed to pay \$2,028 for the bubbly.

Charles and Diana were divorced in 1996. Diana died in a car crash in Paris the following year.

Brolin cited for domestic battery

Actor Josh Brolin was cited for misdemeanor domestic battery over the weekend after his wife, actress Diane Lane, called police during an argument at the couple's home.

Brolin, the son of actor James Brolin and stepson of Barbra Streisand, was arrested at 3 a.m. Sunday and released on \$20,000 bail. Frank Matellan, a spokesman for the city attorney's office, said Monday. The city attorney is reviewing the case and no charges have been filed, he said. Domestic battery is a misdemeanor, Matellan said.

Kelly Bush, the couple's spokeswoman, said the incident was a "misunderstanding" and the couple had reconciled.

Indie producer sues DiCaprio, Maguire

Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire have been sued by a producer who claims the two actors blocked distribution of a 1995 independent film they starred in.

John Schindler says the actors warned potential distributors that DiCaprio wouldn't work with them on other projects if they released "Don's Plum," a low-budget, black-and-white film about a group of friends hanging out at a diner.

The Superior Court complaint, filed Friday, claims they wrongly denied the movie was meant for commercial release and seeks \$33 million and unspecified damages.

Messages left with DiCaprio's publicist, Ken Sunshine, and Maguire's publicist, Kelly Bush, weren't immediately returned Monday.

In 1996, DiCaprio and Maguire settled a \$10 million lawsuit with another producer who accused them of using DiCaprio's superstar status to prevent the movie's release.

The actors have said they made the film as a "favor to a friend" and did so under the agreement that it would never be promoted as a feature-length movie.

Springsteen show nets \$100K for charity

Once again, The Boss gave a boost to the seaside city where he rose to rock 'n' roll fame.

Bruce Springsteen performed two sold-out benefit concerts at a downtown Asbury Park tavern Sunday, raising about \$100,000 for local charities, and urged fans to support the city, which is emerging from decades of decline. Merchants also credited Springsteen with boosting business by offering 10 people a pair of free tickets, along with the chance to meet him backstage, by entering a drawing that required them to visit an Asbury Park store. The holiday benefits have become a tradition for Springsteen, a Freehold native who now lives in Rumson. Like Asbury Park, all the towns are in Monmouth County.

Stories and photos from The Associated Press



Bill Murray stars in Wes Anderson's new film, "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou."

LAT

Bill Murray: Middle-aged muse

Actor finds critical success as inspiration to Wes Anderson

BY RACHEL ABRAMOWITZ
Los Angeles Times

Muses are most often thought of as comely, lithe and young. Throughout history, they've usually been depicted as female guides to inner wisdom that spark the imaginations of great men. But for director Wes Anderson, whose loopy reimagining of the filmmaking experience, "The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou," opens this week, the muse has recently taken the form of a middle-aged man with faintly pockmarked skin, tufts of graying hair and sad, teardrop eyes — the comedian Bill Murray.

In fact, he's standing at the exact spot where the two first met eight or so years ago.

"That's the couch!" says Anderson, pointing to the divan in the bar at the Four Seasons Hotel, a lush expanse now covered with hipsters on the make.

"That's the couch!" deadpans Murray, who's in tow on this expedition.

The two have just spent an afternoon junketeering with the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. It's the beginning of the pre-Oscar Christmas rush, where filmmakers and stars spin through special insider screenings in all the places where Hollywood tastemakers might congregate. Murray, who keeps an 800 number — which he never answers — for dealing with the business, isn't a common sight on the publicity circuit.

Yet here he is — affable and genially uninhibited, in a blue blazer, blue sweater and gray pants. When it's time to sit down, he is almost courtly, pulling out the chair for a reporter and helping with her coat.

Although he's the same height as the 6-foot-11 Murray, Anderson seems half that size. He's thin like a stretched-out rubber band. At 35, he seems like a precocious kid wearing his dad's suit.

Drinks with the pair, who first teamed in 1998's "Rushmore," and one of "Aquatic's" producers, Barry Mendel, has an amiable, off-kilter quality, a semi-ironic jag through an interview process that Anderson in fact lampoons with relish in "Aquatic." As in a Wes Anderson film, the surreal quality is softened by warmth, born here by the

real affection between wunderkind director and his world-weary yet jaunty star.

Anderson, after all, enticed Murray to spend six months in Italy, for less than his customary fee, to play Zissou, a narcissistic and broke oceanographer (Jacques Cousteau on a very bad day) who drags his band of misfits, his mistrustful brainy wife (Anjelica Huston), a pregnant journalist (Cate Blanchett) and a Southern pilot who might be his long-lost son (Owen Wilson) on a quixotic search for the mythical jaguar shark that ate his best friend.

Ask Murray about his recent career reblossoming — with his adoption by two of the leading young filmmakers of this generation, Anderson and Sofia Coppola — and he deadpans, with flirtatious faux naivete, "I'm an adult now. I'm not an ingenue anymore." Pressed, he answers more seriously, "I know why they've asked me. It's because I haven't really embarrassed myself. I don't think I've ruined myself, and I don't think Wes has, either. I'm not overused. If you can do funny things, you can do serious things, too. I can do whatever's required."

Anderson, who has worked with the precision of a short-story writer, has been unleashed structurally as well as financially with "The Life Aquatic."

He's made a picaresque opera, a Don Quixote-esque saga that costs in the neighborhood of \$50 million, more than twice the price of his last film, "The Royal Tenenbaums," which earned \$52 million at the domestic box office. For the Walt Disney Co., which financed the film, this is certainly a nervy move.

The director, who's been monitoring the clock on his cell phone, leaves. The topic shifts, the way these conversations go, to the man who just left the room. Has success changed Anderson? "Everyone changes a little bit when they have success and celebrity," says Murray, sounding like a grizzled eyewitness to that perpetual battle between ego and gratification.

Has Murray's own recent artistic success changed him? The actor seems genuinely pleased to be a part of Anderson's "oeuvre," just as he was to be part of Coppola's success last year with "Lost in Translation." Though he didn't win the best actor Oscar, "I didn't care," he says.

"Honestly, I think I was in the best film of the year," he says, over the last sips of wine. "I loved my movie. That was the prize."



EUROPEAN FORECAST

Benelux: Cloudy with rainshowers in the morning. Highs in the low 40s, Friday lows in the high 30s.

Britain, Ireland: Mostly cloudy. Highs in the mid 50s to mid 40s, Friday lows in the 30s.

Croatia and Bosnia: Mostly cloudy with fog in the morning. Highs in the upper 20s, Friday lows in the low 20s.

France: Mostly cloudy. Highs in the upper 30s, Friday lows in the mid 30s.

Northern Germany: Cloudy with rainshowers. Highs in the upper 40s, Friday lows in the upper 30s.

Southern Germany: Cloudy with 1-2" of snow in the morning and rainshowers in the afternoon and evening. Highs in the low 40s, Friday lows in the upper-30s.

Hungary: Cloudy with snowshowers. Highs in the low 30s, Friday lows in the low 30s.

Northern Italy: Mostly cloudy. Highs in the 40s, Friday lows in the mid 20s.

Southern Italy: Partly cloudy. Highs in the low 50s, Friday lows in the 40s.

Kosovo: Mostly cloudy with morning fog. Highs in the upper 20s, Friday lows in the mid 20s.

Norway: Cloudy with rain and snow. Highs in the mid 20s to upper 40s, Friday lows in the teens.

Portugal: Spains: Partly cloudy with isolated thunderstorms in Southern Spain. Highs in the low 40s, Friday lows in the low 40s to mid 30s.

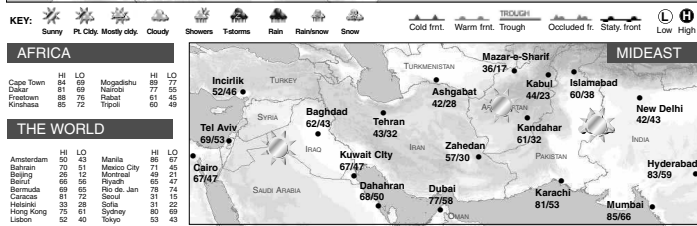
Turkey: Mostly cloudy with rainshowers and isolated thunderstorms. Highs in the lower 50s to mid 40s, Friday lows in the mid 40s to upper 20s.

For current weather watches, warnings, and 5-day forecasts go to the USAFE Operational Weather Squadron home page at:
<https://www.ombach.af.mil>
<http://www.public.ombach.af.mil>

SUN & MOON

	Today	Tomorrow
Sunrise (Baghdad)	7:05AM	7:03AM
Sunrise (Frankfurt)	8:10AM	8:10AM
Sunset (Baghdad)	5:00PM	5:00PM
Sunset (Frankfurt)	3:51PM	3:51PM

	Full moon	New moon	First of year
	28 Dec 04	3 Jan 05	17 Jan 05



TODAY'S STATESIDE OUTLOOK

HI	LO	OK	Cleveland	57	13	Snow	Hamburg	
Adams, Tex.	36	13	City	Columbo Springs	61	33	Rain	Hardford Spring
Albany, Tex.	36	13	City	Columbo Springs	61	33	Rain	Houston
Albany, N.Y.	46	29	Rain	Columbus, Ga.	63	33	City	Indianapolis
Albuquerque	50	14	City	Columbus, Ga.	63	33	City	Jacksonville
Albany, N.Y.	46	29	Rain	Columbus, Ga.	63	33	City	Jacksonville
Anchorage	36	16	Snow	Daytona Beach	75	53	City	Jacksonville
Albany, N.Y.	46	29	Rain	Daytona Beach	75	53	City	Jacksonville
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Albany, N.Y.	46	29	Rain	Daytona Beach	75	53	City	Jacksonville
Albany, N.Y.								

Horoscope

If life is a party, the Gemini moon is a consummate hostess, buzzing around to make sure we're all mixing and mingling. Don't expect anything of depth to be exchanged — but doesn't that take the pressure off? It's so much easier to make that phone call or show up at the meeting when you know it's going to be a breezy (if superficial) encounter.

Holiday Mathis



TODAY'S BIRTHDAY

(December 23). You do your share of howling at the moon this year. Getting in touch with your wildness creates more harmony and fun in your world. This spring, the stars have you unearth unusual abilities such as painting, musical talents, writing and the ability to make money through the stock market. You have a fantastic love match in Cancer and Virgo.

ARIES (March 21-April 19).

The team chemistry is right on today. It's astounding how well you can get along when everyone is working toward a mutual goal. Even someone you thought you were basically incompatible with shows you a new side.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20).

Make the best of a changing situation. It will be a while before you know how things will settle in, so don't spend a bunch of money on what you might need. An organized Virgo can help you through the transition.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21).

Mentally, you're leaping into the future while physically you're doing much the same thing you did yesterday. Singles could put an end to serial monogamy by asking someone for a more permanent relationship.

CANCER (June 22-July 22).

Inheritance figures into today's equation. There are some things you earn in obvious ways and other things you earn in not-so-obvious ways. But you can bet that any gifts you receive now are well deserved.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Your strong opinions and artistic style put you in the minority, but this only

makes you feel more special. Questions of etiquette arise. When in doubt, give a 20 percent tip. Your generosity wings right back at you.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22).

Success is born out of the trust you inspire in others. And why shouldn't they trust you? You're impartial and committed to the public good. You'll get the chance to make a closing statement and leave a lasting impression.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23).

Be on high alert for signals that it's your turn to step in and take over a nasty situation. As soon as the powers that be leave an opening, you can grab the reins and steer things back toward the promised land.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21).

High-stakes ventures are favored. There's no excuse for passing up an opportunity to show someone your work. Risking rejection is just part of success — ask any successful person. Take a chance.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21).

There's no more productive thing you can do than clean up a mess. Turn up the tunes, and tackle it. Until you make a commitment to get organized, useful opportunities will fall through the cracks.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19).

Re-examine and revise your list of things you'd like to accomplish in this lifetime. If you're one of the few Capricorns in the world who hasn't yet made your list, don't wait! It's probably the most important exercise you'll do.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18).

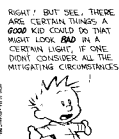
It's tempting to be part of the nuttiness. But to avoid wasting time navigating through chaos, choose a road you know for certain is not under construction. Go for the straightforward tasks you can accomplish in an hour.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20).

You don't need to play hard to get. The fact that you are hard to get is implied already in your busy, fabulous lifestyle. Whether it's a romantic partner, a job or another situation, be yourself, and let it come to you.

Creators Syndicate

Calvin and Hobbes



Jump Start



Zits



Cathy



Hi and Lois



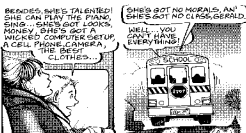
Beetle Bailey



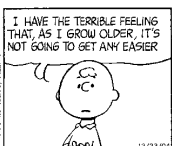
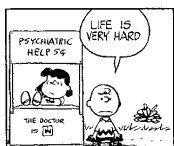
Red Rover



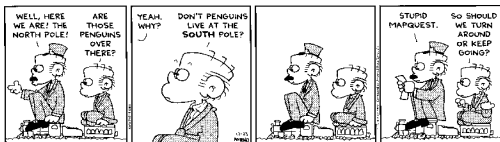
Better or Worse



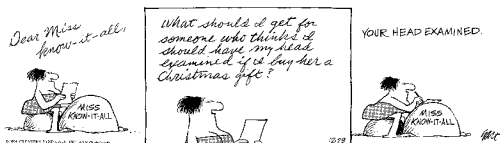
Peanuts



Fotrot



B.C.



Baby Blues



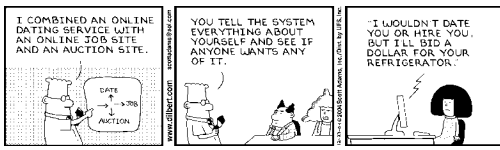
Spider Man



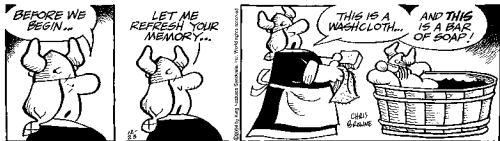
Blondie



Dilbert



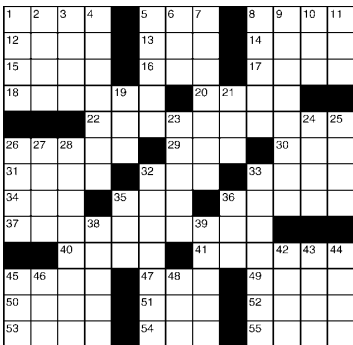
Hagar



Garfield



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



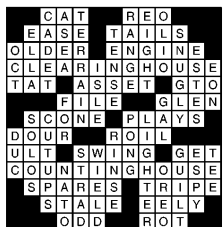
Across

- 1 Beyond control
- 5 Round Table address
- 8 Kohoutek feature
- 12 Creche trio
- 13 Farm implement
- 14 In a bad way
- 15 "do"
- 16 Piratic potable
- 17 Prepare a casserole
- 18 Put aside
- 20 Related
- 22 Hard candy
- 26 Street's boss
- 29 Dryly humorous
- 30 Lemieux milieu
- 31 Unctuous
- 32 Put into words
- 33 Rounded handle
- 34 Altar affirmative
- 35 Depot (Abbr.)
- 36 — cum laude
- 37 Felon
- 40 Indigent
- 41 Garland
- 45 Break ground
- 47 Lumox
- 49 Killer whale
- 50 Messenger's vehicle
- 51 Squid squirt
- 52 Actress Madeline
- 53 Prognosticator
- 54 "CSI" evidence
- 55 Black, in verse

Down

- 1 Writer Kingsley
- 2 Report-card heading
- 3 Look longingly
- 4 Party pooper
- 5 Petrichio's challenge
- 6 Debtor's letters
- 7 Knot again?
- 8 Leg bone
- 9 Comic born
- 10 Irwin Knibberg
- 11 Sort
- 12 Caustic solution
- 13 Forefront
- 14 Crucial
- 15 Master, in jungle movies
- 16 Abby's sis
- 24 Greenspan subj.
- 25 Ms. McEntire
- 26 Dudge
- 27 Verdi opera
- 28 Laggard
- 32 Performance-enhancing drug
- 33 Amateur songfest
- 35 Sellout sign
- 36 Chaps
- 37 Garden shelter
- 39 "The Trial" writer
- 42 Unexciting
- 43 Reverberate
- 44 Horace or Herbie
- 45 Big Bird's home?
- 46 Whopper
- 48 Abby's sis

Answer to Previous Puzzle



12-23

CRYPTOQUIP

RI NROT SUJUCRNHC QHN
RONA WURDHY RNHWC
CXAPDY TAP SUT WJH

IAJ CXRSSROQ IDHUC?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I DON'T EVER CARRY AROUND COINS. I GUESS YOU MIGHT SAY I'M AVERSE TO CHANGE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals F

Abuse of any kind can't be allowed

Dear Abby: You printed a letter from "Beaten Down in Oklahoma," who said that although she had a history of severe depression, her verbally abusive husband refused to allow her to get medication "because he didn't believe in it." He told her she was "worthless" and said he only kept her around so he could be near his kids. That letter could have been written by me five years ago.

I was nine years into a physically and emotionally abusive marriage. I heard the same things from my husband.

And afterward, when he was trying to make up, he too always said he "didn't mean it."

Well, it turned out he did mean it. Once he found his next victim — a younger woman — he walked out. As he left, he announced it was because everything he'd said had been the truth.

You should have advised "Beaten Down" to see a lawyer in

addition to a counselor, while she still has a shred of self-esteem. Following my divorce, I got counseling. Once I felt better about myself, I met a wonderful man. We're married now.

— Full of Hope
in Georgia

Dear Abby: I heard from many readers who identified with that letter and felt it was important for her to get away. Read on:

Dear Abby



Dear Abby: A husband who tells his wife she's worthless and stupid is using verbal abuse to wear her down and control her. Marriage counseling and psychiatrists can't help. The man has low self-esteem and tries to make himself appear powerful and intelligent by making his wife feel inadequate. Every day she stays with him is far more harmful to the children than taking them and leaving.

— Diane in Pennsylvania

Parents' problems are their own

Dear Annie: I am 26 years old and living in my parents' home while I attend medical school full time. My mother is miserable in her marriage to my father (he is significantly older than she is), and it is beginning to take its toll on me.

Every single day, Mom complains that Dad ignores her, doesn't care about her, and on and on. She remembers every wrong anyone has ever done to her as a nurse's grudge. I have been putting up with this misery for a few years now, and it's getting worse. I cannot stand living here, but I cannot afford to be on my own.

I love my mother and want to see her happy, but she carries around a lot of anger and resentment. My father is the "king of oblivion."

He walks around as if nothing is wrong. When I suggest to Mom that she see a counselor, she gets defensive and claims she'll just "live out her life this way." What

Annie's Mailbox



can I do to make my life, as well as my parents' lives, more positive?

— Desperate
in New Jersey

Dear Desperate: You cannot make your parents happy. They are the only ones who can do the work and make the changes that will improve their marriage. Also consider the possibility that your parents are comfortable with this level of misery. Some people derive great satisfaction in complaining.

Don't get sucked in to your parents' problems. As soon as you can afford to move out, do so.

Dear Annie: I am newly married, and my in-laws have come to my home for dinner twice so far. My husband has a little sister, 5 years old.

"Cindy" is a picky eater, but my real problem is with my mother-in-law.

The first time they came to dinner, Mom fed Cindy a bolo-

gna sandwich instead of having her eat what I served. Yesterday, they came again, and Cindy was carrying a McDonald's Happy Meal. Yet Mom frets that Cindy is unwilling to try new foods.

I worked very hard on my dinner and was upset that Cindy was permitted to eat junk while we enjoyed a good meal. Am I wrong to be offended?

Frustrated in West Virginia — **Dear Frustrated:** It's natural that you want to impress your in-laws with your cooking, but Cindy is 5 years old, and it sounds as if she would not appreciate it. Few children that age like to experiment with new foods.

Have you considered the possibility that Mom believes Cindy would reject your cuisine and she wants to avoid hurting your feelings? While it would be nice if she indulged the girl with something healthier, there's no reason for you to be offended.

Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, c/o Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

Creators Syndicate

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NEEMY

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OSKET

MANTED

SETTEA

www.jumble.com

A:

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: PIETY SWOOP STANZA ABUSED

Answer: When they drove by their alma mater they — PASSED THE PAST

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

I guess I've put on a few pounds



DESPITE A TIGHT BUDGET, HE BOUGHT A NEW TUXEDO WHEN IT WAS HARD TO

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Family Circus



12-23

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"... Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse ..."

GRAFFITI

TO SOME, THE OPPOSITE OF MONOGAMY IS POLYGAMY

MSA

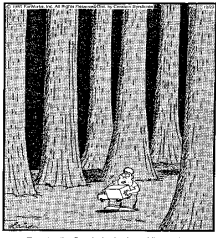
Domis the Menace



"THIS YEAR I GOT HIM TO PUT IT IN WRITING ... AND HIS SIGNATURE!"

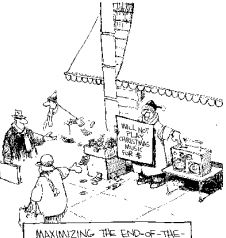
© Gary Larson

The Far Side



Eventually, Stovie looked up. His mother was nowhere in sight, and this was certainly no longer the toy department.

Non Sequitur



MAXIMIZING THE END-OF-THE-SEASON PROFIT INNOVATION

SCOREBOARD

AFN & Radio

Thursday

AFN-Sports, 1 p.m.—College football: GMAC Bowl, Memphis vs. Bowling Green.

AFN-Sports, 4 p.m.—Pro football: NFL Films Game of the Week (10-1) at Cincinnati.

AFN-Sports, 6 p.m.—Pro basketball: Denver at Seattle (10-1).

Friday

AFN-Radio, 1230 a.m.—College football: Fort Worth Bowl, Cincinnati vs. Marshall.

AFN-Sports, 1 a.m.—College basketball: Richmond at Pittsburgh.

AFN-Sports, 2 a.m.—College basketball: Minnesota at San Antonio.

AFN-Sports, 3 a.m.—College basketball: Providence at Memphis.

AFN-Sports, 4 a.m.—College football: Pioneer Pure Vision Bowl, UCLA vs. Wyoming.

AFN-Sports, 5 a.m.—College football: Miami at Sacramento.

AFN-Sports, 6 a.m.—College football: Fort Worth Bowl, Cincinnati vs. Marshall (10-1).

AFN-Sports and Radio, 9 p.m.—Pro football: Green Bay at Minnesota.

For more information, all listings are subject to delayed broadcast. All times are subject to change. Visit www.afrn.net for more information.

Pro football

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE		East		West	
		L	Pct	Pct	PA
NY Jets	12	2	0.637	39	24
NY Giants	12	2	0.637	39	24
Buffalo	8	6	0.571	33	24
Indianapolis	4	10	0.286	34	31
Jacksonville	8	6	0.571	24	25
Tennessee	4	10	0.286	34	31

NATIONAL CONFERENCE		East		West	
		L	Pct	Pct	PA
NY Giants	11	1	0.909	39	24
Dallas	11	1	0.909	39	24
Philadelphia	5	7	0.417	33	24
Washington	9	5	0.637	29	24

	West				
Seattle	7	7	0	.500	319 326
St. Louis	6	8	0	.429	267 356
Arizona	5	9	0	.357	251 291
San Francisco	2	12	0	.143	245 390
x-clinched playoff spot					
y-clinched division					
z-clinched conference					
Friday's game					
Green Bay at Minnesota					
Saturday's games					
Oakland at Kansas City					
Denver at Tennessee					
Sunday's games					
Chicago at Detroit					
San Diego at Indianapolis					
Baltimore at Pittsburgh					

Houston at Jacksonville
 Atlanta at New Orleans
 N.Y. Giants at Cincinnati
 Buffalo at San Francisco
 New England at N.Y. Jets
 Arizona at Seattle
 Washington at Dallas
 Carolina at Tampa Bay
 Cleveland at Miami
Monday's game
 Philadelphia at St. Louis

NFL injury report

NEW YORK (AP) — The National Football League injury report for Friday's game, as provided by the league:

Friday's game		Saturday's games	
Atlanta at Pittsburgh		Atlanta at Pittsburgh	
Carolina at Tennessee		Carolina at Tennessee	
Chicago at Detroit		Chicago at Detroit	
Dallas at Indianapolis		Dallas at Indianapolis	
Denver at Tennessee		Denver at Tennessee	
Indianapolis at Pittsburgh		Indianapolis at Pittsburgh	
Minnesota at New Orleans		Minnesota at New Orleans	
San Francisco at Oakland		San Francisco at Oakland	
Seattle at Dallas		Seattle at Dallas	
St. Louis at Tampa Bay		St. Louis at Tampa Bay	
Tampa Bay at Cleveland		Tampa Bay at Cleveland	

Monday's game		NFL injury report	
Philadelphia at St. Louis		NEW YORK (AP) — The National Football League injury report Friday's games, as provided by the league.	

Green Bay Packers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Oakland Raiders (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Green Bay Packers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Oakland Raiders (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Oakland Raiders (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		San Francisco 49ers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Oakland Raiders (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		San Francisco 49ers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

San Francisco 49ers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Seattle Seahawks (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
San Francisco 49ers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Seattle Seahawks (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Seattle Seahawks (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Seattle Seahawks (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New England Patriots (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New England Patriots (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

New England Patriots (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Buffalo Bills (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
New England Patriots (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Buffalo Bills (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Buffalo Bills (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Cincinnati Bengals (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Buffalo Bills (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Cincinnati Bengals (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Cincinnati Bengals (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Cleveland Browns (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Cincinnati Bengals (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Cleveland Browns (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Cleveland Browns (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Houston Texans (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Cleveland Browns (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Houston Texans (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Houston Texans (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Houston Texans (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New York Jets (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New York Jets (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

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Philadelphia Eagles (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Pittsburgh Steelers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Philadelphia Eagles (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Pittsburgh Steelers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

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Seattle Seahawks (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

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Cleveland Browns (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Houston Texans (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
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Houston Texans (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Houston Texans (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New York Jets (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New York Jets (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

New York Jets (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New York Giants (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
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San Diego Chargers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Seattle Seahawks (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
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Tampa Bay Buccaneers (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	

Washington Redskins (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New England Patriots (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)	
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Jacksonville Jaguars (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)		New York Jets (5-9) at Minnesota Vikings (9-6)
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Memphis, Bowling Green enjoying revivals

Tigers in back-to-back bowls for first time; Falcons looking to continue MAC success

By JOHN ZENOR

The Associated Press

MOBILE, Ala. — When DeAngelo Williams arrived at Memphis, the Tigers had just completed their seventh consecutive losing season and were about to endure No. 8.

"Our class wanted to change that," the prolific junior tailback said. "That's why some of us came here. We wanted to make an everlasting statement for this program, and we definitely did that."

The GMAC Bowl between Memphis and Bowling Green on Wednesday night is a chance for two once down-and-out programs to offer further evidence of impressive turnarounds and to showcase two of the nation's top offenses.

Memphis, which ended a 32-year bowl exile last season, is in the postseason two years in a row for the first time.

Bowling Green, meanwhile, is bowling for green — a \$750,000 payout — back-to-back years for only the second time and first since the 1991-92 seasons. The Falcons are also trying to continue the Mid-American Conference's recent winning postseason ways. MAC teams have won eight of their last nine bowl games.

"We're starting to show you the kind of players that are in the MAC," defensive back Keon Newton said. "We've got guys that can play and we've got guys that can play with the best in the nation."

"We're going to go in to this game not only to make a name for Bowling Green but to make a name for the MAC."

Williams and Bowling Green sophomore quarterback Omar Ja-



Bowling Green sophomore QB Omar Jacobs, the Mid-American Conference offensive player of the year, is the fourth-rated passer in the nation (167.8).

cobs are certainly deserving of more attention.

Williams, Conference USA's co-offensive player of the year, has rushed for 1,828 yards and 21 touchdowns, ranking second nationally in rushing and third in all-purpose yards.

Jacobs is the MAC's offensive player of the year and fourth-rated passer in the nation. He's hoping the GMAC Bowl can be the same kind of showcase for



Memphis's DeAngelo Williams, Conference USA's co-offensive player of the year, has rushed for 1,828 yards and 21 touchdowns this season.

him that it was for former MAC stars quarterbacks Ben Roethlisberger and Byron Leftwich.

"Those quarterbacks, Byron and Ben, have gone on to do well in the NFL and are big-time quarterbacks, and hopefully I'll also have a great game and be added to that list," Jacobs said.

Williams is complemented by quarterback Danny Wimprine, who has posted the school's top three passing seasons and directs the nation's 10th-rated offense.

"They're probably one of the better 1-2 punches in the nation right now," Newton said. "They're pretty explosive offensively."

"We've seen the running attack in Northern Illinois and the passing attack in Marshall. We haven't seen both really in the same game."

Williams is hoping to build much happier bowl memories after watching last year's New Or-

leans Bowl from the sidelines with a torn knee ligament.

"Now, to actually play in one and actually have the opportunity to win back-to-back bowl games — that's unheard of [at Memphis]," said Williams, who has 687 yards and eight touchdowns in the past three games. "That definitely gives us that much more determination to go win."

Jacobs ranks second nationally in total offense and passing yards and his 36 touchdown passes — against just three interceptions — is tops.

"Their passing game is just as good as any we've faced this year," Memphis defensive end Marcus West said. "Their running game can be a threat because of the pass."

The Tigers, who won the New Orleans Bowl last season, have three straight victories since back-to-back losses to Cincinnati and Louisville. Now, they're feeling like old hands in the bowl business.

"Last year I didn't really feel any pressure to win the bowl game," said coach Tommy West, who received a big raise and one-year contract extension this week. "It was almost a sign of relief to everyone that we were going. After 32 years, it was just good to go."

"I think there will be excitement (this time), but I don't think there will be the euphoria that there was a year ago."

The Falcons missed the MAC championship game after blowing a 20-point halftime lead against Toledo, ending a seven-game win streak.

"We just want to finish on a good note," Jacobs said. "We've got a sour taste in our mouth from the Toledo game."

Chance at NFL money means tough decision for Miami's Gore

By TIM REYNOLDS

The Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Frank Gore knows that putting up big numbers in 2005 would greatly enhance his value to NFL teams, result in a higher draft pick and perhaps add many millions to his bank account.

He also knows that one misstep can take the chance at those riches away.

Miami tailback has already bucked the odds once, by overcoming major ligament damage to both of his knees; shattering the right one cost him all of the 2002 season, then blowing out the left one against West Virginia forced him out of the last eight games in 2003.

Now comes the toughest decision Gore has ever weighed: Does he return to Miami next season stronger, healthier and in a great position to impress NFL scouts, or does he roll the dice by taking whatever money comes his way



Miami running back Frank Gore missed all of 2002 and most of 2003 with major knee injuries, so returning for another season is risky. On the other hand, he could use another college season at full strength to improve his statistics and position in the NFL Draft.

now and forgo his final season of college eligibility?

"People always tell me that you can't think about it like that," said Gore, who has 865 yards this season. "If I was thinking about get-

ting hurt, I probably would have never played football again after the first injury. You can't have that on your mind."

Gore says he will wait until after Miami's Peach Bowl matchup on New Year's Eve against Florida to make up his mind. Miami coach Larry Coker is lobbying for a return.

"From what I know from professional people, Frank probably is not a high draft choice right now," Coker said. "Another year with Frank being healthier would be a tremendous benefit to him."

Doctors have told Gore that he likely needed two full years to completely recover from the second injury, and he's been slowed by knee pain on a few occasions this season. He ran for 8 yards in a September victory at Houston, plus managed a combined 73 in the Hurricanes' losses to North Carolina and Virginia Tech.

He also had flashes of brilliance. He rushed for 195 yards in Miami's victory at Virginia, and 124 in a victory at Georgia Tech.

"He's right up there with Willis McGahee, Clinton Portis, all the great backs we've had here," offensive lineman Chris Myers said. "I hope he comes back. He'll have an amazing offensive line here next season. But he'll be in the NFL one day either way and he's got to do what's best for him."

There are other extenuating circumstances surrounding Gore's decision.

Gore's mother has suffered from kidney disease for much of the last decade, and the family has limited financial resources. Plus, he's the father of a 2-year-old son and wants to ensure that he can provide for his child's future.

He's on track to graduate in May — something that people close to Gore consider his greatest achievement, especially considering he read at a third-grade level when he entered high school.

"I'm going to come home after the bowl game and figure it out,"

Gore said. "I haven't been checking up on it. I know that if I decide to come out, I'll have to work hard to impress the scouts in the combine."

His freshman season certainly was impressive: Gore averaged 9.1 yards a carry, helping Miami win the national championship.

Gore would have been the starter in 2002, the year McGahee gained a school-record 1,753 yards and led the Hurricanes back to the national title game. Instead, Gore spent the year rehabbing, fighting off depression and wondering if his NFL dreams would come true — then endured all that again last year.

While acknowledging that there are up to 25 different grades of great running backs in this year's draft crop, Gore doesn't want having the dream dashed for good — perhaps indicating that he may be's leaning.

"I don't know what I'll do," Gore said. "I'll do what I feel is best for me, my family, and my mom."

Stoudamire has impressive return for No. 14 Arizona

The Associated Press

Salim Stoudamire was suspended for Arizona's last game and the Wildcats had their lowest point total in 19 years.

The senior guard was back Tuesday night, and No. 14 Arizona responded with its highest-scoring game of the season, a 105-75 rout of Manhattan.

Stoudamire played 20 minutes and had 23 points on 7-of-8 shooting from three-point range. He made his first seven three-point shots, then threw up an air ball in an attempt to tie the Jason Gardner's school record.

"He got hit on the elbow or that one might have gone in, too," said Arizona coach Luke Olson, who suspended Stoudamire for last weekend's 48-43 victory at Marquette because the guard pointed in the previous game.

Olson told Stoudamire to be himself and quit worrying so much.

"I wanted to have fun regardless of if I played good or not," said Stoudamire, who had seven threes for the fourth time in his career. "I wanted to go out and smile and have fun."

Asked if the suspension fixed what has been an ongoing problem with his moody guard, Olson said, "I hope so because I'm out of ideas."

"Salim is a very nice young man and he needs to show it," Olson said.

Channing Frye added 18 points and 11 rebounds for the Wildcats (8-2), who won their fifth straight. "Everybody said we were in a scoring drought," Frye said, "I guess this raises our average a little bit."

Freshman C.J. Anderson scored 22 points on 7-of-9 shooting for Manhattan (4-3), which committed 24 turnovers.

The Wildcats passed the total they had against Marquette in less than 20 minutes against the Jaspers, taking a 57-29 halftime

College basketball roundup

lead.

"We came out a little surprised by their quickness and athleticism," Manhattan coach Bobby Gonzalez said. "They really put it together tonight."

It was the worst loss in Gonzalez's six seasons with the Jaspers and the first time since 1990 that Manhattan allowed an opponent to score 100 points.

Stoudamire didn't start, but entered with 14:49 to play in the first half and scored 11 points in the next seven minutes. Arizona led by as many as 43 points in the second half and finished 13-for-21 on threes.

"A lot of people are worried about our shooting," Olson said.

"I'm not one of them."

Men's Top 25

No. 3 Oklahoma State 32, NW Oklahoma 35: At Stillwater, Okla., John Lucas and Joey Graham each scored 21 points and the Cowboys (9-0) set a school record with 15 three-pointers. Jameson Curry had eight straight points in a 12-0 run that put Oklahoma State ahead 87-27. The Cowboys were 15-for-23 on threes, including 10-for-15 in the second half.

Tramain Davis scored 12 points for the visiting Rangers (5-4), an NAIA school.

No. 4 North Carolina 93, Vermont 65: At Chapel Hill, N.C., Rashad McCants was held out of the starting lineup because he was late after getting stuck in traffic, but he bounced back from the brief benching to score 19 points for the Tar Heels (9-1).

Sean May had 20 points for North Carolina, which has won nine straight since an opening loss at Santa Clara.

Taylor Coppenrath had 13 points, half his average, for the



Arizona's Salim Stoudamire, who was benched for one game by coach Luke Olson, made seven of eight three-point attempts and scored 23 points Tuesday night in the Wildcats' 105-75 victory over Manhattan.

Catamounts (3-3).

No. 13 Gonzaga 83, E. Washington 70: At Spokane, Wash., Adam Morrison scored 25 points for the Bulldogs (9-1), who won their sixth straight overall and 19th in a row over their in-state rival.

Marc Axton had 33 points, including a school record-tying seven three-pointers, for the Eagles (2-8) in the game played in Spokane Arena.

No. 16 North Carolina 72, BYU 61: At Provo, Utah, Julius Hodge scored 22 points, including four free throws over the final two minutes, and the Wolfpack (9-1) bounced back from Sunday's 68-64 loss at No. 12 Washington.

Mike Hall scored 18 points for the Cougars (2-8), who hosted an Atlantic Coast Conference team for the first time.

No. 17 Iowa 83, Texas Tech

53: At Chicago, Adam Haluska matched his career-high with 21 points and the Hawkeyes (10-1) had 10 blocked shots as Steve Alford beat Bob Knight, his college coach, for the first time in four meetings.

The game at Chicago's United Center was the worst loss for the Red Raiders (5-3) since March 9, 2002, when they lost 90-50 to then-No. 1 Kansas in the Big 12 tournament. The 53 points were their fewest since Jan. 11, 2003, when they lost 68-44 at Kansas State.

Jarrius Jackson led Texas Tech with 16 points and seven assists.

No. 18 Louisville 80, IUPUI 60: At Louisville, Ky., freshman Juan Palacios had 25 points and 10 rebounds to lead the Cardinals (7-2), who won in the first round of the Billy Minardi Classic despite not having Ellis Myles and Otis George, their two leading rebounders, because of injuries. Louisville will play Austin Peay in the title game of the tournament it hosts.

Akeem Clark hit seven three-pointers and scored 23 points for the Jaguars (4-5).

No. 23 Michigan 76, UCLA 64: At East Lansing, Mich., Paul Davis scored 18 points and the Spartans (7-2) won their fourth straight game.

Josh Shippey, one of four freshmen to start for the Bruins (6-2), scored a career-high 18 points.

Service academies

Navy 90, Mount St. Mary's 81: At Emmitsburg, Md., Matt Fannin scored a game-high 19 points and grabbed 10 rebounds to lead Navy.

Cover Johnson contributed 15 points and Greg Sprink added 14 points for Navy (4-6). Sprink and Larame Mergerson also grabbed 10 rebounds.

Landy Thompson scored a team-high 16 points for Mount St. Mary's (3-5).

Average MLB salary drops for only third time

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball salaries went down in 2004 for the first time in a decade and into the third time since record-keeping began nearly 40 years ago.

The average dropped 25 percent this year to \$2,313,535, ac-

Sports briefs

According to final figures released Tuesday by the Major League Baseball Players Association. The average had been \$2,712,189 in 2003.

Since the union started keeping track in 1967, the only previous decreases had been a \$86 drop in 1987, when owners were found to have conspired to hold down salaries among free agents, and a 4 percent decline in 1995, following a 7½-month strike that wiped out the World Series for the first time since 1904.

Rocca wins men's slalom after Miller crashes

FLACHAU, Austria — Italy's Giorgio Rocca won the men's World Cup slalom on Wednesday after American Bode Miller crashed and failed to qualify for the second run.

Rocca finished with a combined time of 1 minute, 34.86 seconds, beating Austria's Rainer Schoenfelder by 0.24 seconds. German Alois Vogl was third,

0.31 seconds behind for the first podium finish of his career.

Miller still leads the overall standings with 858 points after 15 events. Austria's Benjamin Raich, who finished sixth Wednesday, is second with 546 points, followed by Hermann Maier with 482.

Maze takes women's GS for second career World Cup win

ST. MORITZ, Switzerland — Slovenia's Tina Maze won her second career World Cup race Wednesday, and defending champion Anja Paerson regained the lead in the overall standings with a second-place finish in the giant slalom.

Maze was behind Paerson after the first run, but had a smooth, clean second run down the sun-soaked Engiadina course to finish with a combined time of 2 minutes, 26.96 seconds. Paerson finished second with an aggregate time of 2:27.11, with Marie Jose Rienda Contreras of Spain third in 2:27.73.

Julia Mancuso had the best U.S. result, finishing sixth in 2:28.52.



The deadline to enter your picks for the NFL Challenge is fast approaching!

Log in every week during the 2004 NFL Season and make your picks for the winners of the upcoming NFL games. Earn points for every winning team you pick and at the end of the season, you may find yourself the winner. *Enter the code "from Monday's paper and NFL.com" at your point total for the week!

*Certain rules and restrictions apply. See the official rules at www.oconus.com and at www.strips.com. There is no cash prize, but you must register to play.

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Jaguars' Darius fined \$75,000 for clothesline hit

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jacksonville safety Donovan Darius was fined \$75,000 by the NFL on Tuesday for a hit across the neck of Green Bay's Robert Ferguson that left the wide receiver temporarily paralyzed.

NFL briefs

Darius, who was ejected from the game, wasn't suspended because league disciplinarian Gene Washington said this was the first time he had been fined for a violation.

The hit came during the fourth quarter of Jacksonville's 28-25 victory at Green Bay.

Ferguson caught a pass over the middle, and Darius hit him across the helmet and neck with a forearm. Ferguson regained feeling in his legs after he was hospitalized. He remained in the hospital Sunday and Monday nights.

He was released on Tuesday. Darius said in a statement that he spoke with Ferguson on Monday.

"We had a good conversation in which he told me he has no hard feelings," Darius said. "We agreed that it was a part of the

game. The most important thing is that Robert is OK."

Darius, whose annual salary is more than \$4 million a season, was ejected from the game by referee Ed Hochuli.

"You violently and unnecessarily struck your opponent in the neck and head area with your forearm," Washington said in his letter to Darius.

"I don't know him personally. He seems like a good guy and it's an unfortunate hit," Packers quarterback Brett Favre said. "And his comments were he was going for the ball. Maybe he was. Maybe his sole intention was to knock the ball out, but it just didn't seem like it."

"You'd hate to think that you'd ruin a guy's career, and Fergie, by all accounts, will come back from it. But mentally will he be the same? I don't know."

Jacksonville coach Jack Del Rio defended his player on Monday, saying Darius never intended to hurt Ferguson.

"It was a nasty shot, but I don't believe his intent was to headbutt the guy," Del Rio said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with Robert Ferguson. My understanding is he's doing OK up there and everything's going to be all right."

NFL injury update

Injuries to prominent NFL players, followed by team's prognosis. (See Friday's edition for complete injury report, provided by the league):
• **Bill Davis** (Miami): hyperextended and bruised knee status uncertain.

But it was a scary situation and a very serious situation."

Dolphins want to talk with LSU's Saban again

DAVIE, Fla. — Miami Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga wants to talk with LSU coach Nick Saban again before offering anyone the team's coaching job.

Saban interviewed with Huizenga last week and is the front-runner to become the sixth coach in Dolphins history. Former Oakland Raiders coach Art Shell interviewed Monday, and Dolphins interim coach Jim Bates interviewed Tuesday.

Emerging from his meeting with Bates, Huizenga declined to say whether there are other candidates. But he said the Dolphins weren't ready to make an offer.

"We still have a lot of work to do," Huizenga said. "We just have to figure out how soon we can get it done. Hopefully it won't be too much longer."

Raiders' Woodson, Anderson quiet a day after their arrests

ALAMEDA, Calif. — Charles Woodson and Marques Anderson returned to work Tuesday and met with coach Norv Turner a day after their arrest for public intoxication.

"It's always a concern," Turner said of suspect off-field behavior. "It's an unfortunate situation, and we're going to deal with it."

He didn't elaborate on disciplinary action the team might take. Anderson practiced, but Woodson was held out with a knee injury and is doubtful for Saturday's game at Kansas City.

The rest of the Oakland Raiders didn't want to talk about their teammates' trouble.

"I block that out," defensive end Bobby Hamilton said. "It's up to the individual."

Neither Woodson nor Anderson had addressed their teammates about what happened, and they weren't in the locker room during media availability.

League spokesman Steve Alic said Tuesday the players could qualify for the NFL's substance-abuse program, but only suspensions — and not fines — are made public. Woodson might

already be part of the program because he has a previous offense.

A spokesman with the Alameda County District Attorney's office said her office expected to receive police reports from the arrests by late Tuesday or early Wednesday, and the players could face charges.

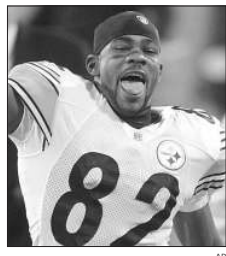
Woodson and Anderson were arrested at 4:20 a.m. PST Monday in Oakland after refusing to leave the back seat of a woman's car, and both were jailed briefly. The woman's name and age weren't released, though she is from Oakland. It was unclear whether the players knew her.

Police said Woodson and Anderson were uncooperative, had problems maintaining their balance, had bloodshot watery eyes and a strong odor of alcohol. They were acting in a belligerent manner, police said.

Cheifs change punters

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs released punter Steve Cheek on Tuesday and signed Nick Murphy, who played in three games for Baltimore this year.

Cheek had a net average of 31.6 yards and had difficulty in the 45-17 win over Denver on Sunday.



Steelers receiver Antwan Randle El would like to celebrate home-field advantage in the AFC playoffs with one more victory.

Steelers go for the clincher vs. Ravens

By ALAN ROBINSON

The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers have a chance to play a meaningless game this season after all.

For six consecutive weeks after Pittsburgh beat New England 34-20 on Oct. 31, the Steelers (13-1) and Patriots (12-2) matched each other for win or loss as each sought home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs. The Steelers owned the tiebreaker, but understood that one badly played game could change that.

"We knew there was going to be a team to beat somebody," wide receiver Hines Ward said Tuesday. "Hopefully, it wasn't us having a letdown game."

Now, after the Dolphins rallied from 11 points down with three minutes remaining

to beat the Patriots 29-28 on Monday night, the Steelers can clinch a first-round bye and the home-field edge by beating Baltimore (8-6) on Sunday.

By extending their club-record winning streak to 13 games, the Steelers would ensure that their Jan. 2 game at Buffalo (8-6) would decide nothing more than whether they finish with the best record in franchise history.

"They're playing great football right now, so you don't want to have to win that (Buffalo) game," running back Jerome Bettis said. "We need to take care of business at home. This game is going to mean everything. This is the biggest game of the year."

Beating the Ravens would allow coach Bill Cowher to rest at least some of his half-dozen injured regulars for two weeks,

since the Steelers would sit out the wild-card round Jan. 8-9. Of that group, wide receiver Plaxico Burress, cornerback Chad Scott, linebacker Clark Haggans and running back Bruce Staley aren't expected to be fully healthy until the playoffs, and linebacker Kendrick Bell might not return at all.

"If we get this game, we clinch home and we get the bye and, going to Buffalo, I'm pretty sure a lot of people won't play," Ward said. "For whatever reason if we don't win this game, and we have to win in Buffalo, then you have two weeks where we're trying to put this one win together. But this week, what better way than having Baltimore come in?"

The Ravens held the Steelers their only loss 30-13 in Baltimore on Sept. 19, when quarterback Tommy Maddox injured his right elbow and was lost for six weeks.



Top Scores for Week 15

Best Overall Scores

250	berkster	CEC	2616	giants#1	hbc 2/37 ar
238	dolphinfan	Dodds, Sollars Elem.	2600	STEELFROGWOOD	MAG-12
232	mukat	Yokosuka	2598	Jaguar One	DoDDS
230	PilgrimPride	Yokosuka	2596	Jack58	422 ABS RAF Croughton
230	diesel44express	35 CES Misawa	2596	Who Cares	MMF-1DCSPER
226	Chipboudy	Camp Anaconda	2586	Bone-Daddy	HQ, USAREUR, G2
220	BIGLEW30	MRBN	2576	Joe Corleone	Misawa
220	YO! HERO	Camp Huggins	2572	BengalsAltheWay	ECJ2-JAC-DSTE
220	AJlay	Camp Zama	2558	NEOBIT	USFJ
220	what time is it?	na! atsugi	2556	chargers	napra

See websites for official game rules.

Check this space every Thursday during the entire NFL season for the weeks Top Scores and Best Overall Scores during the NFL Challenge.

Dodgers back out of deal, angering Yanks

N.Y. thought Johnson trade was final, pursued Beltran

BY RONALD BLUM

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Confident their deal to acquire Randy Johnson had been finalized, top Yankees' officials headed to Florida on Tuesday to see Carlos Beltran. By the time their meeting with the star outfielder was over, the trade for the Big Unit had fallen through.

The Los Angeles Dodgers reversed course Tuesday and withdrew from the proposed three-team, 10-player trade that would have sent Johnson from the Arizona Diamondbacks to the Yankees.

"As we sit here right now, the deal is no more," Dodgers General Manager Paul DePodesta said during a conference call. "I've been saying all along that we weren't going to do the deal unless it made sense for this club in 2005, and that was not the case."

Los Angeles would have received right-hander Javier Vazquez from the Yankees along with two top prospects, catcher Dioner Navarro and third baseman Eric Duncan. The Dodgers also would have gotten pitcher Mike Koplove from Arizona.

Arizona would have obtained

Baseball roundup

outfielder Shawn Green and pitchers Brad Penny, Yency Brazoban and Brandon Weeden from the Dodgers.

Along with Johnson, the Yankees would have gotten pitcher Kaz Ishii from Los Angeles.

"The Dodgers reneged on the deal that was agreed to last Friday, unequivocally and with no contingencies except for a window for contract extensions and physicals," Yankees president Randy Levine said. "For some reason, the Dodgers over the weekend started to backpedal. Why they would break their word is only something they can answer. It sure is disappointing, and we'll have to think long and hard before ever doing business with the Dodgers again."

Diamondbacks managing general partner Ken Kendrick wouldn't comment on the Dodgers' decision. He intends to resolve Johnson's situation by the end of the month.

"We don't think it's a healthy thing for us or for him for the uncertainty of his situation to continue into next year," Kendrick said.



The deal sending Randy Johnson to the Yankees fell through, but the Diamondbacks said they will resolve his status by then end of the month.

Levine and general manager Brian Cashman went to Florida to join owner George Steinbrenner in the meeting with Beltran, likely to get the largest contract among this offseason's free agents. The session at Legends Field in Tampa, which also included agent Scott Boras, lasted about one hour, and no offers were made.

Earlier in the day, an official of one of the teams and a person close to one of the players involved in the trade said the deal had been submitted early Tuesday to baseball Commissioner

Bud Selig for approval. The two spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The official said the Dodgers gave the go-ahead to finalize the trade late Monday and early Tuesday, when two conference calls were held. One call involved the general managers and baseball executive vice president Sandy Alderson, and the other included ownership representatives and Selig.

"We went over various considerations and most of the details of the proposed transaction," Alderson said. "I expected to have a follow-up this morning, and that never occurred."

The Yankees even told Vazquez's agent that the deal had been submitted for approval, causing the agent to tell the pitcher he had been traded.

But Pat Courtney, a spokesman in the commissioner's office, said in the afternoon that more documentation had to be submitted before Selig could consider the complex transaction, and the Dodgers then held a conference call to announce their withdrawal.

"There were specific things in this deal that didn't work out," DePodesta said. "There were a lot of things to work out, a lot of things that were tentatively agreed on, but still details that we needed to work through."

In free agent news, third baseman Joe Randa agreed Tuesday to a \$2.15 million, one-year contract with Cincinnati, and Colorado agreed to one-year contracts that kept catcher Todd Greene (\$750,000) and right-hander Jamey Wright (\$550,000) with the Rockies.

In addition, the Yankees finalized their \$4 million, two-year contract with second baseman Tony Womack, a deal agreed to Dec. 7.

New York also reached a preliminary agreement with right-hander Tanyon Sturtz on a one-year deal worth about \$850,000 and called a news conference for Wednesday to finalize its \$39.95 million, four-year contract with right-hander Carl Pavano.

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SPORTS



Arbitrator rules J. O'Neal's suspension should be reduced by 10 games, Page 30

AP wants poll out of BCS

BY RALPH D. RUSSO

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — It looks as if the Bowl Championship Series is headed for another major overhaul.

The Associated Press has told the BCS to stop using its college football poll to determine which teams play for the national title and in the most prestigious bowl games.

Since the BCS was implemented in 1998 by officials from the Big East, Big 12, Big Ten, Atlantic Coast Conference, Pac-10, Southeastern Conference and Notre Dame, the formula it uses to rank teams has been tweaked almost every year. But the AP poll and the ESPN/USA Today coaches poll have always been an integral part.

The AP said such use was never sanctioned and had reached the point where it threatened to undermine the independence and integrity of the poll.

The AP sent BCS coordinator Kevin Weiberg a cease-and-desist letter, dated Dec. 21, stating that use of the poll is unlawful and harms the AP's reputation.

"We respect the decision of the Associated Press to no longer have its poll included in the BCS standings," Weiberg said in a statement Tuesday. "Since the inception of the BCS, the AP poll has been part of our standings. We appreciate the cooperation we have received from the organization in providing rankings on a weekly basis. We will discuss alternatives to the

Associated Press poll at the upcoming BCS meetings and plan to conclude our evaluation of the BCS standings formula, including any other possible changes, by our April meeting."

Where the BCS goes from here won't be determined for a while, but even before the AP made its poll off limits Weiberg had said that the BCS planned to look into the possibility of using a selection committee to create the bowl matchups, much like the NCAA Division I basketball tournament.

This season, the AP and coaches poll were given more weight than ever in the BCS standings. Each poll accounted for one-third of a team's BCS grade and total

points were factored in, not just ranking, which was the case before.

A compilation of six computer rankings made up the final third of teams' BCS grade.

The new system put heightened scrutiny on the two polls.

In its letter, the AP said some of its poll voters had indicated they might no longer participate because of concerns over having their reporters be so closely involved in the process of determining which teams play where.

"By stating that the AP poll is one of the three components used by BCS to establish its rankings, BCS conveys the impression that AP condones or otherwise participates in the BCS system," the letter said.



SEE BCS ON PAGE 26

Jackets jump on Orange



Georgia Tech's Chris Reis, second from left, celebrates with teammates Kenny Scott (2), Nathan Burton (15) and Dawan Landry (20) after intercepting a Syracuse pass and running it in for a TD in the first quarter of the Champs Sports Bowl. See story on Page 26.



James lifts game, team against T-wolves, reigning MVP Garnett

Page 30



Arizona rebounds from dismal game to rout Manhattan

Page 27

Dodgers pull out of deal sending Johnson to Yankees Page 31